

THE SCOTTISH DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT
IN THE AGE OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

By the late eighteenth century, as a result of economic developments and growing social divisions, the rôle of the traditional governing classes was being increasingly called in question and demands were arising for a fundamental reorganisation of the political system. In July 1792 certain Foxite Whigs, dissident burgh reformers, religious dissenters, and radical artisans formed the Society of the Friends of the People to channel growing popular unrest into constitutional agitation for parliamentary reform. The society attracted a large membership and won wide popular support, but failed to win over the bourgeoisie and gentry who, alarmed both by numerous demonstrations of support for the French revolutionaries and by the rapid circulation of republican literature, became convinced that their liberties and properties were threatened by popular radicalism and rallied to the defence of the 'old regime'. The reactionaries had little popular support, but, backed by the state, they embarked upon a partly successful campaign of intimidation. Increasingly fearful of the threat to liberty and reform posed by the 'despotism' of government and convinced, by the 'apostacy' of their erstwhile allies and by the rejection of their reform petitions, that a more radical approach was called for, the Friends of the People allied themselves with their English colleagues and held a British Convention to decide how to resist any further acts of tyranny and to declare for universal manhood suffrage. The forced dispersal of that convention and the subsequent conviction of leading radicals destroyed the reform movement and led directly to the 'Pike Plot', a naive insurrectionary conspiracy, which alerted government to the increasing danger from revolutionary movements and caused the screw of repression to be tightened further. By 1797

the United Scotsmen, a secret revolutionary society modelled on the United Irishmen, had taken advantage of mounting popular discontent to promote their aims and organisation. Identified with unpopular republican and deist doctrines, and seen as the agents of French imperialism, their appeal, while not insubstantial, was limited. Dependent for their success upon ample French support for co-ordinated uprisings in Ireland and Britain, the dismal failure of the premature Irish insurrection of 1798 and of the French to provide more than token military assistance damaged the United Scotsmen's morale and virtually destroyed their credibility. A revolutionary 'underground' continued to operate into the 1800s, but organised radicalism was only to revive in strength in the post-war period.

DECLARATION

This thesis has been composed entirely by myself and is my own work.

JOHN D. BRIMS. 1983.

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CHAPTER I

The Background to the Rise of the Scottish Democratic Movement

Seventy years have elapsed since H.W. Meikle first published his account of the Scottish radical reform movement of the 1790s¹, and although various historians have added to our knowledge and revised some of Meikle's findings his work remains by far the best single account of the subject. However, like any other historian, Meikle was essentially a man of his own time, and it was perhaps inevitable that questions which now appear central to an understanding of the subject were either unasked or inadequately answered back in 1912. Moreover, Meikle's Whig view of history, which regarded the radical agitation of the 1790s as but a part of a greater movement of 'political awakening', originating with the burgh and county reformers of the 1780s and culminating in the Great Reform Act of 1832, has been rendered untenable by the findings of many subsequent historians. Thus, the time for a reappraisal of the Scottish democratic movement, and necessarily, a fresh look at its background has come.

It is sometimes popularly imagined that social tensions are somehow a product of the industrial revolution and an irrelevance to the study of pre-nineteenth century Scotland. In fact the case is far otherwise. Conflict between landowner and tenant in lowland Scotland was of long standing, and can be seen in the many examples furnished by seventeenth and early eighteenth century records of popular opposition to the exaction of labour services, the payment of teinds, and thirlage

1. H.W. Meikle. "Scotland and the French Revolution" (Glasgow 1912).

to the estate mill². In the burghs too, conflict between masters and journeymen had a long history³. Here, however, conflict was lessened and obscured by the high expectations of upward social mobility entertained by many journeymen⁴, and by the paternalist conventions of what E.P. Thompson has called 'the moral economy'.

2. Many examples could be cited, but one from each category must suffice. The Baron Court records of Stitchill (Roxburghshire) record that on 5 September 1692, "The qlk day anent ane Complaint given in be John Underwood Procurator Ffiscall of the said Court against the haill tenants and cottars within the said Barronnie of Stitchill makand mention that wher they and ilk ane of them are obleidged to make dew and thankful service to the right honourable the laird of Stitchill their Master conform to use and wont. And trew it is and of verity that the said inhabitants within the said Barronnie doe refuse to work... to the Laird of Stitchill therein when required as the said Complaint beares. Which the said Judge taking to his consideration ratifyes and approves the former Acts made theranent and unlaws the haill persons transgressors who refused to work ilk person in 5 lib. Scots money." "Records of the Baron Court of Stitchill 1655-1807." Publications of the Scottish History Society. 1st Series, L, 107-108.

The same source records that on 12 October 1662 "Adam Hamiltoune for hydeing and conceiling of his cornes in the yaird unteynded is unlawed and amerciat [i.e. fined] in the sowme of 20 libs. Scots money at the Laird his mercy." This case was followed by an act of barony laying down that the standard fine for future offenders was to be £10 Scots. IBID, 25.

On 24 May 1698 the Baron Court of Urie (Kincardineshire) received "ane complent given in by William Gibone, at Mill of Cowie, against the haill tennents within the sucken of the said Mill, for ther abstracting of ane great quantity of ther grindable grane of the said Mill" and also on "The said day Hugh Mowat, at Mill of Montwheich, gave in the like complent against the tennentis within the sucken of the Mill." "The Court Book of the Barony of Urie in Kincardineshire 1604-1747." Publications of the Scottish History Society. 1st Series, XII, 104-105.

3. In Aberdeen for example, the journeymen tailors were in dispute with their employers over working hours and wages in 1720, while in 1732 the master wrights and coopers complained that their journeymen had entered "into signed associations among themselves whereby they became bound to one-another under a penalty not to continue in their master's service or to work after seven o'clock at night contrary to the usual practice". W. Diack. "History of the Trades Council and the Trade Union Movement in Aberdeen" (Aberdeen, 1939), 4.

4. T.C. Smout "A History of the Scottish People 1560-1930" (London, 1969), 362.

The principle that underpinned the moral economy was that economic activity should be controlled by authority in order to prevent any section of the community from exploiting another. Thus Town Councils and Magistrates regulated prices to ensure equity between producers and consumers, and fixed wages at levels hopefully fair to both employers and employees. The origins of the moral economy stretched back into the middle ages, at least as far back as 1426, and although the administrative details of the system were occasionally altered by Parliament, most notably in 1617, it survived intact into the early eighteenth century. It was therefore a system of some antiquity and acceptability. However, during the course of the eighteenth century a variety of factors combined to gradually overturn the old paternalist economy and replace it with an individualistic, increasingly free-market orientated, economic system. This transformation was achieved only gradually and even by the end of the century it was incomplete. While wages and prices were increasingly left to the operation of market forces, the justices of the peace still retained and sometimes used their powers to fix wage rates, and the magistrates of many burghs still fixed the price of wheaten bread⁵. Moreover, the Merchant Guilds and trade Incorporations still tended to protect their ancient exclusive trading rights, although in some cases these rights were given up at a relatively

5. The Justices of the Peace retained the statutory right to fix wages until 1813, but long previous to this they had given up regular attempts to do so except in the matter of farm servants' wages. A.E. Whetstone. "Scottish County Government in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries" (Edinburgh, 1981), 49-50. However, when negotiations between master tradesmen and their journeymen broke down the Justices were frequently called in to arbitrate. C.M. Burns. "Industrial Labour and Radical Movements in Scotland in the 1790s". University of Strathclyde. Msc. Thesis 1971. p.88. The assize of bread was not abandoned in Glasgow, for example, until 1801. G. Eyre-Todd. "History of Glasgow", III, "From the Revolution to the Passing of the Reform Acts 1832-1833" (Glasgow, 1934), 409.

early period and in others were coming under increasing attack⁶.

Nevertheless, the transformation from a 'moral' to a free-market economy was complete enough to warrant comment from perceptive contemporaries.

In 1792 the Rev. Robert Small (1732-1808) of St. Mary's parish, Dundee, observed that while "In the two former centuries, the prices of various necessaries of life, as meal, malt, ale, leather, shoes, &c. were regulated by the magistrates and council... The price of no necessary is now regulated in this manner, except for bread made from wheat flour⁷".

The old moral economy passed away largely unlamented by the Scottish landed and business classes. There is little evidence, even during the nightmarish famine years of 1795-6 and 1799-1801, that any significant body of opinion within either of these classes favoured the resurrection of the old system⁸. However, a significant number of the

6. For example, the Merchant Guild of Stirling appointed a committee on 18 July 1789 "to prosecute James Hunter for opening a shop in the Burgh and selling merchant goods to the prejudice of the guildbrethren when he has no right to exercise such a privilege". "Extracts from the Records of the Merchant Guild of Stirling. AD 1592-1846" (eds. W.B. Cook and D.B. Morris) (Stirling, 1916), 157. In Glasgow however "the substance of guild restrictionism" had "vanished by 1740... and left the burgh, despite her ancient charter, as free on the eve of the industrial revolution as upstart English towns like Birmingham or Bradford". Smout, *op cit*, 388.

7. "The Statistical Account of Scotland. Drawn up from the Communications of the Ministers of the Different Parishes". (henceforth cited as OSA), VIII, 247.

8. The failure of the ruling classes to enforce the moral economy produced considerable popular resentment. On 29 November 1799 a hoax proclamation was issued in Campbeltown. The proclamation, which claimed to have been issued by the Justices of the Peace, Commissioners of Supply, and Heritors of Kintyre, stated that - "They had under consideration the present state of the Country and that a Scarcity of Meal and Grain is to be apprehended, in course of the Season unless particular care is taken to secure and keep within the County, all the Grain, Meal, Potatoes, Butter and cheese now there. They therefore Resolved Unanimously not to allow any of these articles to leave the Country on any Pretence whatever, and they Prohibit the sending the same away, And Notice is hereby given that Customhouse officers Constables Schoolmasters and others along the Coast are instructed to Seize and Inform against all Vessells attempting to carry away any of the above articles... All Farmers and others are required to bring their Meal, Grain, Potatoes, Butter and cheese to the public market at Campbeltown... All distilling is prohibited under severe penalties". Justiciary Papers. Small Papers. Main Series. (henceforth cited as JC) JC 26/309.

lower orders, and in particular the artisans, clung tenaciously to at least some of the values associated with the moral economy. The late eighteenth century meal riots, as K.J. Logue has shown, were an assertion by the 'menupeuple' of Scotland of their right to be supplied with foodstuffs at a 'fair' price⁹.

The values of the moral economy were anathema to the leadership and, it appears, the vast majority of the rank and file of the Scottish democratic movement of the 1790s. They were committed to economic individualism and to a concomitant reduction of corporate power within society, and optimistically looked forward to a golden age of prosperity which would be achieved when the individual was liberated from restrictive economic regulations which served only to stifle enterprise, and from regressive, class-biassed, taxation which unfairly burdened the poor and industrious in order to benefit on idle and profligate aristocracy¹⁰. Moreover, although there are scraps of evidence here and there which indicate an attempt by some individuals in a few 'mobs' to fuse together the ideologies of the radicals and the moral economists, the overwhelming bulk of the evidence supports the radicals' own disclaimers, denying involvement in the meal mobs of the 1790s.¹¹

It is paradoxical that it was the artisans who played the most prominent role in both the defence of the moral economy and the democratic movement of the 1790s when the economic objectives of each appear so different. The apparent contradiction is indicative not of

9. K.J. Logue. "Popular Disturbances in Scotland 1780-1815" (Edinburgh, 1979), Chapter 1, pp. 18-53.

10. This subject will be discussed in Chapter 2

11. Logue, op cit, 46-48, 213.

any lack of popular support for either cause, but rather of the confused response of the lower-orders in general and of the artisans in particular to the transformation of Scottish society. As producers they wished to be free to maximize the profits of their labour, but as consumers they favoured the retention, or restoration, of price controls over essential foodstuffs. Such a stance may well have been ideologically inconsistent, but it must be remembered that the late eighteenth century was a time of complex and profound social and economic change. The old certainties, what Galt called the "regularity of ancient affairs", had been destroyed or were under threat, and men were left to cope as best they could with a rapidly changing world that stretched their powers of comprehension to the limit, and sometimes beyond. It is therefore hardly surprising that there was no consistency or unanimity in their response to these changes. Moreover, the presence of radically minded men in some of the meal mobs, as also the economic policies of the revolutionary sans-culottes in France¹², should warn us off any temptation to equate economic with political conservatism. It may well have been that there were many rank and file democrats who believed in price controls on essential foodstuffs, but that because the hey-day of the democratic movement did not coincide with a period of food-price inflation their views went unrecorded for posterity. Had the Friends of the People still been active during the lean years of 1795-6 and had the United Scotsmen survived as a formidable organisation into the near-famine period of 1799-1801 it would have been of interest to see what their views were then on food pricing. It is perhaps not unreasonable to speculate that, if the

12. G.A. Williams "Artisans and Sans Culottes. Popular Movements in France and Britain during the French Revolution" (London, 1968), 40-43. See also G. Lefebvre "The French Revolution from 1793 to 1799" (Trans. by J.H. Stewart and J. Friguglietti) (London and New York, 1964) 50-68.

political situation in Britain had deteriorated as much as some conservatives feared it might in the 1790s and the country had been flung into a revolutionary turmoil, then the laissez-faire policies of the Friends of the People would have been discarded in favour of a French style 'Maximum' in order to win over the urban poor¹³.

Integrally associated with the changeover from a moral to an individualistic economic system were the beginnings of what historians usually refer to as the Industrial and Agricultural Revolutions. In truth, the term Industrial Revolution is misleading when applied specifically to the eighteenth century. A more appropriate expression would be the "Textile Revolution", for while many areas of industrial activity experienced growth during the last quarter of the century they were all totally overshadowed by the immense expansion of the textile industry¹⁴. Moreover, while many industries remained untouched by technological and organisational change, the textile industry was directly or indirectly affected by both.

Both the linen and cotton industries grew substantially during this period, but the growth rate of the cotton industry was especially impressive. Such was the growth of the cotton industry in the western counties of Renfrewshire, Lanarkshire, Dumbartonshire and Ayrshire in particular that Scotland experienced a fundamental shift in the balance of its population in favour of that region, with the greatest concentration being found in that area centred on Glasgow.

13. It is interesting to note that when the United Irishmen adopted a revolutionary policy and attempted to win over the rural masses to that policy some of the keener spirits realised that they would have to abandon their old conservative land policy, which was based on the inviolability of property rights, and began to formulate more radical ideas based upon the redistribution of land. R.B. McDowell "Ireland in the Age of Imperialism and Revolution 1760-1801" (Oxford, 1979), 375-378.

14. Smout, op cit, 250-251. The discussion of the textile industry is largely based upon the accounts given in Smout's work and in H. Hamilton "The Industrial Revolution in Scotland" (Oxford, 1932) 93-147.

Therefore, while a concentration of radical political activity in the textile producing areas is strongly suggestive¹⁵, it should be remembered that these were the areas where an increasingly large proportion of the population lived, and, consequently, where one would naturally expect to find any such concentration.

The labour demands of the vibrant cotton industry played a major part in the expansion of the ancient burghs of Glasgow and Paisley¹⁶, but the industry's growth should not be glibly associated with a thorough-going process of urbanisation. Most of the early spinning mills were situated in rural areas, and the weaving industry, while increasingly organised from urban centres, was spread throughout the countryside. The majority of weavers, in fact, lived and worked in rural or semi-rural environments¹⁷. In 1801 there were only seven towns in the whole of Scotland with a population of more than 10,000¹⁸, and the country was to remain a predominately rural one well into the nineteenth century.

15. This topic will be discussed in Chapter 3.

16. The population of Glasgow had increased from 23,546 in 1755 to 61,945 in 1791, an increase of 38,399. OSA, v, 511. Robert Heron visited Paisley during the autumn of 1792. He later wrote, "At length, we drew near to Paisley. But, its suburbs have so spread themselves over the environs, that I had fancied, that we had actually entered Paisley, a considerable time before we were, properly speaking, within it... Its inhabitants are weavers and spinners of all different denominations". Robert Heron. "Observations made in a Journey through the Western Counties of Scotland; in the Autumn of MDCCXCII. Relating to the Scenery, Antiquities, Customs, Manners, Population, Agriculture, Manufactures, Commerce, Political Condition, and Literature of these Parts". (Perth, 1793), II, 399, 402.

17. N. Murray. "The Scottish Hand Loom Weavers 1790-1850: A Social History" (Edinburgh, 1978), 16.

18. Smout, op cit, 256.

The organisational structure of most sectors of Scottish industry remained untouched by the eighteenth century phase of the industrial revolution, and even into the nineteenth century "the typical industrial unit was still a single master working with an apprentice and a journeyman within the framework of craft regulations on premises no bigger than a backyard".¹⁹ However, the application of water power to the spinning process necessitated a profound organisational change in the textile industry. As yarn could be produced in much greater quantities and at much lower cost by the new process than by the spinning wheels of the domestic worker production came to be increasingly concentrated in factories.

The political significance of this development, at least in the short-term, was, despite some extravagant claims to the contrary²⁰, minimal. Some cotton spinners did indeed become radicals, but the contribution of their occupational group to the democratic movement of the 1790s was slight. The reasons for this are to be found in the nature of the new technology and in the behaviour of the early mill owners. Richard Arkwright's water-frame, which was used in the mills constructed in the 1780s and early 90s, could be attended by women and children since little muscular effort was required. Consequently, the mill owners and their managers recruited few men. Of the 301 workers employed at the two Balfour cotton mills in 1791 only 29 were males over the age of fifteen²¹. Only with the introduction of mule-spinning in the 1790s did the production process require much adult male labour, but the impact of this new method was relatively gradual, and even by 1812 there were less than 1,000 men employed in the spinning mills of Renfrewshire, the most heavily industrialised county in

19. Smout, op cit, 246.

20. For example, see G.P.Insh "Thomas Muir of Huntershill" (Glasgow 1949), 14-15.

21. OSA, II, 154

Scotland and a centre of the cotton industry²². Politics, in the normally accepted meaning of the word, was an exclusively male preserve in eighteenth century Scotland, and women did little or nothing to disabuse a highly patriarchal society of this idea. Consequently, whatever their attitudes towards the mills and the mill-owners, women played no direct part in the popular political movements of this time. The political impact of the cotton-spinning revolution was also limited by the paternalistic behaviour of the cotton masters of the 1780s and 90s. While working their employees hard, for long hours, under a strict disciplinary system, they tried to ensure that they were well housed and their children educated. Generally speaking they were worlds removed from the hard-faced and hard-hearted cotton masters of the nineteenth century²³.

The first power-looms were capable of producing only the plainest and coarsest of cloth, and consequently the weaving industry remained unaffected by technological innovation. Weaving continued to be organised on a domestic basis, with the typical weaver working either in a loom-shed adjoining his own house or in a small workshop. The weaving village of Kilwinning in Ayrshire was not untypical in this respect. There, the sixty seven master weavers employed, on average, less than two journeymen and one apprentice each²⁴.

22. W.M. Metcalfe. "A History of the County of Renfrew from the earliest times". (Paisley, 1905), 379.

23. Smout, op cit, 410.

24. Out of a total number of 233 weavers, 67 were masters, 104 were journeymen, and 62 were apprentices. OSA, XI, 160.

Nevertheless, the hand-loom weavers did not remain un-affected by the textile revolution. From about the middle of the eighteenth century onwards, the increasing demand for cloth produced a more commercial climate which led to a steadily increasing proportion of weavers working on the 'putting-out' system, whereby, instead of being directly commissioned by customers, they were employed by merchants or their agents, who supplied them with yarn and collected the finished webs. This development was most noticeable in the west of Scotland, where the Glasgow and Paisley merchants came to dominate the industry by the 1780s and early 90s as increasingly the weavers of north Ayrshire²⁵, Renfrewshire²⁶, Lanarkshire²⁷, and Stirlingshire²⁸ fell into their entrepreneurial orbit. Elsewhere too, the same development was taking place: in rural Perthshire many weavers became the employees of a group of Perth 'manufacturers'²⁹, Kirkcaldy merchants expanded their business

25. J. Strawhorn. "Ayrshire. The Story of a County". (Ayr, 1975), 94.

26. OSA, VII, 87, and, for example, the village of Eaglesham. OSA II, 122.

27. For example, Hamilton, where "Formerly, almost all the weavers... either employed themselves, or derived their employment from others on the spot. Now they get employment from the great manufactures of Glasgow". OSA, II, 199. See also, Strathaven, where "the weavers are almost wholly employed by the Glasgow and Paisley manufacturers". OSA, IX, 387.

28. The business interests of the Glasgow and Paisley merchants stretched as far east as the burgh of Stirling itself. OSA, VIII, 284.

29. G. Penny. "Traditions of Perth, containing sketches of the manners and customs of the inhabitants, and notices of public occurrences, during the last century: interesting extracts from old records; notices of the neighbouring localities of historical interest; typographical sketch of the county; brief history of Perth, etc." (Perth, 1836), 251-252.

empires into the Fife countryside³⁰, and in Angus linen weavers were recruited by aggressive Dundee merchants³¹. Villages such as Newburgh, where the weavers retained the full measure of their traditional independence, were becoming increasingly unusual by the 1790s³².

The typical Scottish hand-loom weaver retained many of the characteristics of the independent producer³³, but by switching from the old 'customer' to the newer 'putting-out' system, he became, in a sense, a wage-earner and his much vaunted independence grew somewhat illusory. Gradually the weavers came to acknowledge that their situation had changed and they began to form trade-unions to protect their interests.

As early as 1773 the silk and linen weavers of Paisley had formed a union to oppose wage cuts and had appointed a committee to direct its operations. Employers were picketed "day and night" and blacklegs were stoned and threatened with being "used as Bishop Sharp or Porteous"³⁴. In 1779 the Glasgow weavers successfully demonstrated against intended legislation to permit the importation of French cambrics, and one year later the weavers' clubs in and around Glasgow united in an unsuccessful attempt to secure a uniform scale of weaving

30. OSA, XVIII, 29-30.

31. J. Thomson and J. Maclaren. "The History of Dundee; being an account of the origin and progress of the burgh from the earliest period; embracing a description of its antiquities, topography, public works and buildings, manufactures and commerce, municipal, educational and charitable institutions, with biographical sketches of eminent men". (Dundee, 1874) 325.

32. OSA, VIII, 180-181.

33. This is discussed on p.16.

34. W. Hector. "Selections from the Judicial Records of Renfrewshire". (Paisley, 1878), II, 196.

prices³⁵. Then, in 1787 the Clyde Valley Weavers' General Association was formed to resist threatened wage cuts and a meeting called for Glasgow Green, which was attended by "vast crowds" of weavers who appointed committees "to meet with the masters, to receive their ultimatums, and to report"³⁶. While negotiations were still, apparently, going on the dispute took a violent turn, with "large bodies" of weavers raiding blacklegs' shops and forcibly removing their webs. On 30 June, a large meeting of strikers on Glasgow Green was told that negotiations had broken down, and thereafter the strike became progressively more violent. Blacklegs' loom-sheds were raided, their looms wrecked, their webs cut out and burned, sometimes after being symbolically paraded through the neighbouring streets. Employers were threatened and assaulted, their warehouses raided, and their stock seized and burned. On 3 September, an attempt by the magistrates to disperse a riotous assembly of striking weavers, who were burning blacklegs' webs, was met by a fusillade of stones and bricks. The military having been called in by the exasperated magistracy, the crowd pelted them with stones too, and eventually the troops were ordered to open fire, killing three rioters and wounding several others. The next day the weavers reassembled in the Calton district of Glasgow and burned more blacklegs' webs, but dispersed when it was learned that the military were on their way. Thereafter the disturbances died down and the weavers returned to work defeated³⁷.

35. N. Murray, op cit, 185.

36. The Scots Magazine, IL, 359.

37. This account of the strike is based upon the reports contained in The Glasgow Mercury, June to September inclusive, 1787, and the Scots Magazine, IL, 359, 465-6.

The activities of the weavers' combinations in this period bear many of the hallmarks of what E.J. Hobsbawm has described as "collective bargaining by riot", but they also reveal some of the characteristics of what was to become 'normal' trade-union behaviour in the nineteenth century. The mass meeting of strikers, the appointment of committees to oversee the strike and direct the strikers' tactics, the picketing of employers' premises and the intimidation of blacklegs, were all to become par for the course in the nineteenth century. Yet there is something more than the employment of crowd violence which marks these strikes out as peculiarly pre-industrial in character. A combination was formed to meet a specific threat, such as an attempt to cut 'prices'. There was nothing permanent about union organisation in this period because the weavers did not regard themselves as being under any permanent threat. Their attitude is partly explained in the statements of their strike committee, published in the Glasgow press during the strife-torn summer of 1787. These statements reveal not class hostility but rather a feeling of resentment at the behaviour of men who were, only a short time previously, their friends and colleagues - "they whose loom seat-boards are scarcely cold since they left them, and who may soon have occasion to return"³⁸. Indeed there was no large social gap between a hand-loom weaver and a cotton or linen merchant at this time. The high wages paid in the 1780s and early 1790s enabled many to accumulate the small amount of capital necessary to commence business as merchants³⁹, while the susceptibility of the industry to severe cyclical depressions pushed many merchants back into the ranks of the weavers again⁴⁰. Moreover, the weavers rarely referred to their income

38. The 'Glasgow Mercury, 8-15 August 1787.

39. Murray, op cit, 64.

40. OSA, XVI(1), 33.

as wages, preferring instead to employ the term 'prices' which in itself is suggestive of their view of themselves as semi-independent producers rather than wage-earners. The hand-loom weavers seem to have been reluctant to acknowledge that their status had changed, but on one occasion at least they confronted reality square in the face and determined to attempt the restoration of their full independence. When the 1787 strike had been running for two weeks, the strike committee proposed a sort of co-operative venture which would be financed by 6,000 weavers in and around Glasgow putting up the required capital⁴¹. The object was, no doubt, partly to provide income for the strikers and partly to put pressure on the employers to accede to their demands, but it can also be seen as an attempt to restore the weavers' full independence as self-employed producers. A similar desire to establish independence can be seen in the activities of the Edinburgh journeymen shoemakers when they went on strike over wage rates in October 1798. The shoemakers' union hired a shop, purchased a quantity of leather, employed two of its members as managers, and 'gave out work to such Journeymen as wanted it' at the highest rates⁴². The authorities took a dim view of this co-operative venture and the shop was closed by order of the Sheriff-depute⁴³. To the journeymen shoemakers of Edinburgh, the Glasgow weavers, and indeed all artisans the great goal in life was 'independence', - the status of the self-employed producer who was responsible to his customer and to no one else. Co-operative ventures were a novel route to this goal, for most the traditional route from apprentice to master via journeyman still held good and guaranteed the independence desired.

41. The Glasgow Mercury, 4-11 July 1787.

42. JC 26/300 Criminal Letters: H.M. Advocate agst Peter Arnot et al, 1799.

43. IBID Declaration of James Henderson, 1 December 1798.

Despite his changing role within the textile industry the hand loom weaver still retained much of the status of an independent producer. He did not see himself as part of a working class movement. Indeed, such an idea, had it been presented to him, would have been dismissed as incomprehensible and preposterous. He still retained control over when he commenced and finished work, and over the pace at which he worked; he still tended to own his own house, loom-shed and loom⁴⁴; and, most importantly, he retained the mental outlook of the artisan. The journeyman still had high, and realistic, hopes of becoming a master, and the master could still realistically aim at becoming a merchant. Consequently, the weaver held a great respect for private property, which he regarded as the legitimate reward of industry. Moreover, the weaver was proud of his skill and conscious of his superior status above that of the common labourer⁴⁵. In all this he was typical of the artisan community as a whole.

Among the lower orders the artisans, and in particular the weavers, were something of an intellectual elite. The educational attainments and intellectual prowess, particularly in theological matters, of the lower orders in general were by no means inconsiderable, but the independence of the artisan gave him the time and high wages gave him the money to exercise his intellect more than most. The artisans valued education highly, both for themselves and their children. They sent their children to school⁴⁶, read books, pamphlets

44. Murray, op cit, 153.

45. Even the artisans' friendly societies and social clubs tended to be exclusive.

46. Murray, op cit, 161.

and newspapers avidly⁴⁷, and discussed all manner of topics with a knowledge and skill that impressed their contemporaries⁴⁸. They gloried in their independence of mind and spirit as well as in their economic independence. Deference, whether social, intellectual, or political, was distasteful and unthinkable to them, and they pursued a fiercely independent line in many matters, but especially in religion and politics. These characteristics were especially marked among the weavers, who attracted attention partly because they constituted by far the most numerous category of artisans in late eighteenth century Scotland. They were well described by the biographer of John Duncan, a Kincardineshire weaver who achieved some fame as a botanist, as -

"a remarkable class of men - intelligent, and observant of the progress of events at home and abroad; devoted to politics, strongly or wildly radical, if not tainted with revolutionary sentiments, after the first French Revolution; great talkers when they gathered in the street or public house, during the intervals of work; intensely theological, often religious, well versed in all the intricacies of Calvinism, severest critics of the ministers' discourses, and keenest of heresy-hunters, scenting it from afar, in phrase or simile, herein only being strong conservatives -

47. For example, Robert Heron observed of the Kilbarchan weavers that "Newspapers and other periodical publications circulate among them, and are eagerly read". R. Heron, op cit, II, 393.

48. Their skill as economists, for example, so impressed Peter Mackenzie that he opined that "they could argue on any question of Political Economy with the most learned Professors in all the land". P. Mackenzie. "Reminiscences of Glasgow and the West of Scotland" (Glasgow, 1865), I, 107.

in a word, general guardians of the Church, reformers of the state, and proud patrons of learning and the school-master"⁴⁹.

It was to this class of men, the artisans, and in particular the weavers, the most prosperous and numerous among them, that the doctrines of radical reform were to appeal most. As men of property (however little), education, and economic independence they thought themselves entitled to exercise political rights, and when circumstances presented them with an opportunity to make their voice heard they proved willing and vociferous recruits to the democratic movement⁵⁰.

The late eighteenth century was a transitionary phase in the making of the Scottish working class. During the last quarter of the century a growing tendency for journeymen to organise themselves into trade unions⁵¹, and, more significantly, into permanent unions can be detected. The Edinburgh journeymen tailors' union, for example, had a continuous existence from at least as far back as the 1770s⁵². The evidence is scanty, but it seems that the journeymen of some trades at least were coming to see their interests as being diametrically opposed to those of their employers. This process was probably speeded up by a realisation that entry to the ranks of the masters was no longer as easy as it had been in the past⁵³. Whatever

49. W. Jolly. "The Life of John Duncan Scotch Weaver and Botanist with sketches of his friends and notices of his times" (London, 1883) 23-24.

50. This topic will be discussed in Chapter 3, pp. 200-205.

51. H. Hamilton. "An Economic History of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century" (Oxford, 1963), 346-350.

52. JC 26/303. Declaration of Alexander Marshall, 14 November 1799.

53. The minister of Hamilton observed, in 1791, that "The changes in the state of our manufactures... having removed the intermediate gradations in the scale of society, operative people, deprived of the prospect of advancing a step higher, have lost that incentive to economy and industry". OSA, II, 200.

the cause, trade unionism seems to have grown in strength during this period, although it must be stressed that its progress was gradual and that in no sense can a working-class movement be said to have evolved by 1800. Many unions grew out of the various ad hoc bodies which were set up to deal with particular disputes, but others seem to have developed out of pre-existing friendly societies and trade clubs⁵⁴. The friendly societies, which existed to provide old age and sickness benefits, funeral expenses, and sometimes even widows' pensions and provision for the orphaned children of members, had a long history, and by the 1790s they were a familiar part of Scottish life. In 1791 there were ten such societies in Hamilton alone, of which the most important were the two weavers' societies with a combined membership of 180⁵⁵. In 1792 the city of Glasgow could boast of at least eighty societies, many of which were organised on a trade basis⁵⁶. The organisation and function of the friendly societies were closely modelled on those of the Incorporation, the masters' organisation. Working men not only learnt from the masters how to organise themselves, they also showed a willingness to ape their socio-cultural values. Thus, the friendly societies displayed an almost obsessional desire for respectability. The constitution of the "United Society in and about North Leith", for example, laid down that "every member, previous to his admission, shall give ample proof of his moral character... and that this may be examined into, he shall be presented by two Members one month before he is admitted,

54. W.H. Marwick. "A Short History of Labour in Scotland" (Edinburgh, 1967), 4.

55. OSA, II, 205.

56. IBID, V, 524-528.

who shall have known him six months before"⁵⁷. Furthermore, any member who had become ill through "irregularity or debauchery" was not to be eligible for sickness benefit, and members who turned up at meetings "in liquor" or cursed and swore at meetings, were to be liable to a fine of three pence⁵⁸. Respectability was therefore not simply a Victorian labour-aristocrat's obsession, it also dominated the eighteenth century tradesman's view of how he ought to behave. The great care taken by the Friends of the People to ensure that only men of sound moral character were admitted was, in part, a tactical move designed to prevent the association from being infiltrated by rioters and other undesirables, but it was also an assertion of the values of the "menu peuple" of Scotland. Eighteenth century artisans were self-consciously respectable whether in their friendly societies, trade unions, or political clubs.

The organisation and objectives of some of the early unions were relatively sophisticated. The "United Journeymen Shoemakers" of Edinburgh, which was apparently formed during the winter of 1794-5 and continued in 'permanent' existence until at least 1799, may be taken as an example of this relative sophistication. The union was organised into "lesser meetings" which reported to "general meetings", committees were appointed to direct union business, subscriptions levied from members, strike pay paid, lawyers hired to defend the union's interests, tickets and certificates issued to members "as an introduction to Similar Societies in other places", and financial contributions "received from other Societies and from the funds of

57. "Articles of the Constitution of the United Society in and about North Leith, for Raising a Fund for the Supply of their indigent Members". (Edinburgh, 1783), 2.

58. IBID, 5-7.

other Trades" during strikes⁵⁹. The Edinburgh union was in correspondence with other shoemakers' unions in Glasgow, Paisley, London, Hull, Hamilton, Greenock, Perth, Dundee, Cupar, Berwick, Alloa, Dunbar, Kirkcaldy and Newcastle⁶⁰, and although there was no national organisation the various local unions assisted each other. The Edinburgh union sent money to Hull to assist the shoemakers' union there during a strike⁶¹, and various unions sent money to assist the Edinburgh strikers during their strike in 1798 as well as providing help to Edinburgh men who went on the 'tramp'. John Gardener and six other Edinburgh shoemakers wrote to Alexander Hay, one of the leading lights of the Edinburgh union and of the 1798 strike, from Liverpool, 26 November 1798, -

"Brother Shope Mates,

We write you these few lines to let you know that we arrived hear on No^{vbr} 11th in good health, and was very kindly received by the precedent of the society, who found us work the next day. The society hear is in a flourishing state, and the best shopes are for the most part brought in to the society and will set-down none but such as belong to it... When we arrived in Glasgow we were remarkably well treated by the committee who gave us our supper lodgings and breakfast at their own expense, besides 2/- of tramping money each, with a letter of recommendation to Greenock. At Greenock we were found lodgings and work... We hope you are

59. JC 26/300 Criminal Letters: H.M. Advocate agst Peter Arnot et al, 1799.

60. IBID. Based upon the union's Address Book and an untitled paper listing the postages paid by the Union.

61. IBID. Declaration of Archibald McCulloch, 1 December, 1798.

all in high spirits, and wish you success in the laudable
contaste... and we remain brother shope mates, true flints"
[i.e. loyal union members]"⁶².

Their letter added that shoemakers on the tramp "ned not be afraid
for work nor frinds whill they carey a caird allong with them".

The growth of trade unionism, the development of more
permanent and more sophisticated organisation, and the establishment
of wider links with other trade unions throughout the country (albeit
of the same trade), mark a substantial step forward in the march of
trade union history. Moreover, in the payment of contributions
not only "from other Societies" but also "from the funds of other
trades" to the striking shoemakers of Edinburgh in 1798, we can
perhaps see the first glimpse of an emerging working-class
consciousness. Nevertheless, the importance of these developments
lay largely in the future; for in the 1790s the idea of a working-class
was, at best, but dimly perceived.

The law relating to trade unionism "was extremely ambiguous"
in Scotland until the notorious McKimmie case of 1813 dispelled all
ambiguity by declaring trade unionism illegal⁶³. The fact that many
unions operated successfully in the late eighteenth century without
incurring the wrath of the law, and that most prosecutions of trade
unionists were for mobbing and rioting, or intimidation, suggests
that simple combination was not accounted a crime under Scots Law.
However, the position is complicated by certain cases in the 1790s,
which seem to suggest the opposite⁶⁴. Of these cases most is known
about the shoemakers' case in 1799. The master shoemakers of

62. IBID. John Gardener to Alexander Hay, 26 November, 1798.

63. J.L. Gray. "The Law of Combination in Scotland", Economica,
VIII, (1928), 332-333.

64. IBID, 335-336.

Edinburgh had apparently entered into a combination and, while raising the prices of shoes, had attempted to reduce their journeymen's wages⁶⁵. The journeymen struck work and application was made, apparently by both sides, to the Justices of the Peace to arbitrate⁶⁶. The Justices of the Peace approved the wage-table drawn up by the masters, as did the Court of Session on appeal⁶⁷. The journeymen refused to accept the verdict and continued their strike. Prosecution for unlawful combination, possibly at the instigation of the masters, and, subsequently conviction of the union's leadership followed⁶⁸, although there is no evidence that the strikers employed either violence or intimidation. It is unclear whether the strikers' leaders were convicted simply for combination or for refusing to accept the decision of the statutory authorities with regard to their wages. Whatever the case, the court's verdict placed severe restrictions on the ability of working men to protect their interests. Moreover, it is surely not without significance that the employers' combination was not prosecuted. Scots law, even in the 1790s, was developing an unevenness in its treatment of employer and employee interests which was to fuel the flames of class antagonism.

65. The Scots Chronicle, 2 November, 1798.

66. IBID.

67. JC 26/300. Declaration of Archibald McCulloch, 1 December, 1798.

68. Peter Arnot, Alexander Hay, and James Henderson pleaded guilty to a charge of unlawful combination before the High Court of Justiciary on 25 February 1799 and were sentenced to one month imprisonment. Scots Chronicle, 1 March 1799.

The Scottish radicals' attitude towards trade unionism is unclear. Paine's disapproval of all forms of combination⁶⁹ is well known, and is entirely consistent with his uncompromising economic individualism. The great radical ideologue's disapproval was shared by the United Irishmen⁷⁰, for example, and it might be expected, given their general commitment to economic individualism, that it would also have been shared by the Scottish radicals. However, no evidence of such a position has come to light. On the other hand, no unequivocal statement of support for trade unionism is to be found either. The Scottish radicals outlined their views on the rights of labour in a handbill entitled "The Origin of Government", which was published in Edinburgh in September 1792⁷¹. The handbill stated that -

"In every free country, the artist [i.e. the artisan], mechanic, and labouring man, has a right to bargain for his labour; and how is it that in Britain, which is called the land of freedom, they are by laws deprived of that national right? Why are they not as free to make their own bargain as the law-makers are to let their farms and houses at what they deem their value?"⁷².

69. Paine wrote that "whether a combination acts to raise the price of any article for sale, or the rate of wages; or whether it acts to throw taxes from itself upon another class of the community, the principle and the effect are the same; and if one be illegal, it will be difficult to shew that the other ought to exist". T. Paine. "Rights of Man. Part the Second combining Principle and Practice". (5th Edn, London, 1792), 102.

70. R.B. McDowell, op cit, 374.

71. J. Stirling to H. Dundas, 22 September 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland), in the Scottish Record Office. RH 2/4/64, ff. 329-332.

72. T.J. Howell. "A Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceedings for High Treason and other Crimes and Misdemeanours from the Earliest Period to the Year 1783, with Notes and other Illustrations: Compiled by T.B. Howell, Esq. F.R.S., F.S.A. and Continued from the Year 1783 to the Present Time: by Thomas Jones Howell, Esq." (London, 1817), XXIII, 29.

It is surely significant that while the Scottish radicals were not slow to condemn all statutory controls on economic activity, such as the wage-fixing powers objected to above, they had nothing to say explicitly about trade unionism. Their silence was but a reflection of the nature of their movement. The democratic movement, while attracting support from many groups within society, obtained the bulk of its following among the artisans and small shop-keepers, to whom trade unionism was still essentially an irrelevance. To these men the struggle was not one between employers and employees, but one between the wealth producing sections of the community 'the People', who were excluded from the **political** process, and the non-producers, "the Aristocracy", who dominated that process. It is more than coincidental that even when discussing the rights of labour the Scottish radicals identified their 'class' enemies as the landed classes, "the law makers" who, while maximising the income from their own property in the market place, denied the same right to labour.

The landowning classes bestrode eighteenth century Scotland like colossi. The rural economy and virtually every aspect of rural life (at a time when the vast majority of Scots lived and worked in a rural setting), the Church of Scotland, the legal profession and the law itself, the education system at parochial level, high culture, politics (both national and local), and administration were all dominated by the nobility and gentry. In short, there was hardly an area of Scottish life which was not firmly grasped by the tentacles of all-embracing landed power. Such a concentration of power was not unusual by the standards of contemporary Europe, nor was it inevitable that it should be resented and opposed. It was the application of that power in certain unpopular directions that exacerbated existing class divisions and provided the fertile political ground in which the democratic movement of the 1790s could grow.

The eighteenth century saw the beginnings of what it used to be fashionable to describe as the Agricultural Revolution. The last word has certainly not been written on this controversial subject, but certain facts seem clear and some relevant conclusions may be drawn. The 'Agricultural Revolution' in Scotland was a long time in the making, being gradual and piecemeal in its operation even when it began to gather momentum in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. It was the gradual and piecemeal nature of the 'revolution' which, by leaving one area entirely unaffected while its neighbour was improved, helped to prevent discontent growing to such a level as to threaten a full-scale rural revolt. Landlords were all too painfully aware of what they saw as the ingrained conservatism of their tenantry, and complained bitterly of how difficult it was to persuade them to accept 'improvements'. Persuasion and gradualism were usually their watch-words and 'improvement' was rarely implemented at such a pace or with such heavy-handedness as to transform rural disgruntlement into open revolt. Moreover, many landlords still took a paternalist interest in the welfare of their tenantry, which was both sincere and effective in restricting dissatisfaction. Their paternalism was rewarded by deference on the part of their tenants, and together paternalism and deference stabilised existing social relationships. Nevertheless, the absence of any full-scale rural revolt, should not deceive us into thinking that there was no discontent at all and that 'improvement' was considered as beneficial by all. Rural discontent,

both over traditional grievances such as thirlage and labour services⁷³, and over the consequences of 'improvement' did exist and found its expression in bitter denunciations of the tyranny and greed of landlords⁷⁴ and, occasionally, in physical resistance to unpopular developments, such as the enclosure of commonties which deprived the poor of their traditional access to common pasture⁷⁵. Feelings could run high in moments of confrontation, but while the agrarian protestors were swift to condemn the actions of their lairds as ungodly and unjust they never attacked the problem at source by demanding an end to landlordism. Landlordism, in their view, was

73. For example, in 1792 the Rev. John Bruce of Forfar wrote that "On some of the estates in the parish, the exaction of bondage service is still in use; and besides the stipulated rent in money or grain, some tenants pay poultry and pigs, and must leave their own work at the landlord's call, to assist in ploughing, harrowing, cutting the corn, casting the peats, driving coal and other errands and carriages, in hay time and harvest, and at any other time of the year. This is indeed agreeable to bargain, and the number of these services is usually specified and valued in the leases; but they are generally as unpopular as impolitic, and accordingly begin to be omitted in new contracts of lease. Mill thirlage also exists in this parish and is considered as a grievance". OSA, VI, 531.

74. The most powerful indictment of landlordism in this period was probably that penned by Robert Burns, himself a tenant farmer, in his "Address of Beelzebub", for which see "The Poetry of Robert Burns" (eds. W.E. Henley and T. F. Henderson) (Edinburgh, 1896), II, 154-156. That his strictures on landlordism were not limited to the activities of Macdonald of Glengarry but applied to landlordism itself, is evidenced by his letter to Mrs. Dunlop of Dunlop, 24 September, 1792, in which he complains of the tenants hardships and compares it, resentfully, with the lairds' prosperity and supposed happiness. "The Letters of Robert Burns" (ed. J. De Lancey Ferguson) (Oxford, 1931) II, Letter 510, pp. 125-126.

75. For example, when in 1780, John Earl of Hopetoun attempted to exclude the villagers of Aberlady (East Lothian) from access to the common moor where they had exercised a traditional right of pasturage, his surveyors were attacked by an irate crowd and forced to beat a hasty retreat. It was 1786 before the commonty was finally divided. "Directory of Former Scottish Commonties" (ed. I.H. Adams) Scottish Record Society, New Series, No. 2, (1971), p.92.

not in itself an evil: the evil lay in the activities of certain lairds who had abandoned their responsibilities to their tenants. The 'Levellers' Lines' of the Galloway insurgents, who rose in the 1720s to pull down the hated enclosures, expressed the Scottish peasants' attitudes perfectly, -

"Among great men where shall ye find
A Godly man like Job,
He made the widows heart to sing,
But our Lairds make them sob.
It is the duty of great men
The poor folks to defend,
But worldly interest moves our lairds,
They mind another end."⁷⁶

There is no reliable evidence to sustain the idea that the Scottish peasantry were committed to a "primitive socialist ideology".⁷⁷ A few intellectuals, such as William Ogilvie, "a most ingenious and accomplished recluse",⁷⁸ advocated the redistribution of landed

76. W. Mackenzie. "The History of Galloway from the Earliest Period to the Present Time." (Kirkcudbright, 1841), II, 395.

77. J. Young. "The Rousing of the Scottish Working Class" (London, 1979), 25 and 28.

78. Ed. R.J. Mackintosh. "Memoirs of the Life of the Right Honourable Sir James Mackintosh" (London, 1835), I, 17. James Mackintosh had been a student of Ogilvie at King's College, Aberdeen.

property⁷⁹, but their ideas commanded little support and seem in any case to have been regarded as the stuff of academic discussion rather than serious programmes of political action. Tenant farmers envied the independence of the landed proprietor and resented paying rent⁸⁰, but they seemed unwilling or unable to make the mental leap required to advocate a redistribution of land. While the radical artisans of the 1790s came to consider, and some to advocate, a Paineite

79. William Ogilvie's book, entitled "An Essay on the Right of Property in Land, with respect to its foundation in the law of nature; its present establishment by the municipal laws of Europe; and the regulations by which it might be rendered more beneficial to the lower ranks of mankind". (London, 1782), advocated a redistribution of land in order to produce the greatest number of yeomen farmers that the country's size would permit, pp. 30-31. His argument was based on two premises: firstly, the right of all to an equal share of land, and, secondly, the right of those whose industry had increased the productivity of the land to a share in the increased profits, pp. 11-12, 17-18. Ogilvie attempted to reconcile those rights by proposing that an assize should determine the "perpetual rent" to be paid by the new yeomen to the landlord as compensation for the improvements which he or his predecessors had carried out. pp. 145-146. Ogilvie found difficulty in squaring his desire to create a land of independent, virtuous yeomen, with his belief in the need for social subordination. In the end he came down in favour of the latter, stating that "Every person who has acquired an allotment in this manner, shall pay the lord of the manor, certain aids and services of a feudal nature, so regulated, as to produce that degree of connection and dependence which may be expedient for preserving order and subordination in the country". p. 154. However radical his plans for the redistribution of land, it is a serious mistake to regard Ogilvie as a social radical. In some ways he is a profoundly conservative figure.

80. For example, see Robert Burns' letter to Mrs. Dunlop of Dunlop, 24 September, 1792, in which he writes - "I cannot say that I give him joy of his life as a Farmer - 'Tis, as a farmer, paying dear, unconscionable rent, a cursed life! - As to a Laird farming his own property; sowing corn in hope, and reaping it, in spite of brittle weather, in gladness; knowing that none can say unto him, 'What dost thou!' - fattening his herds; shearing his flocks; rejoicing at Christmas; and begetting sons and daughters... 'tis a heavenly life! - but devil take the life, of reaping the fruits that another must eat." "The Letters of Robert Burns" ed. J. De Lancey Ferguson. (Oxford, 1931), II, 125, Letter 510.

programme of land redistribution⁸¹, there is no evidence that such a programme found much support among the tenant farmers and landless labourers.

The tenant farmers and cottars of eighteenth century Scotland may have had limited objections in their struggle with the landlords, but that they saw themselves as being engaged, at least on occasion, in such a struggle, there can be no doubt. Thus, while Scotland never experienced the bitter tenant/landlord conflict which, for example, wracked certain areas of contemporary Ireland, there did exist in Scotland a deep well of hostility between landlord and tenant from which the radicals were to draw. When James Tytler (1745--1804), the impoverished polymath and radical, sought to discredit the House of Commons as composed of men from whom the people could expect nothing, he argued that -

"you must consider the house of Commons as your enemies.

They affect to call themselves the democratical part of the constitution. They are not; they are a vile junto of aristocrats. The majority of them are landholders; and every landholder is a despot in the most true and literal sense of the word. He can, directly or indirectly, extort from the country what he pleases; he can raise the price of provisions; he can turn people out of their possessions; he can drive them to the utmost ends of the earth; and, in short, turn the country, at least that part of it which he possesses, into a wilderness, if he pleases. It is this monstrous power of the landholders that you have to combat."⁸²

81. The radicals' attitude towards property will be discussed in Chapter 3, pp. 214-223.

82. Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 3.

The radicals were never able to command as much support among the agrarian community as they would have liked⁸³, but their antipathy towards the landed classes struck a ready chord with a sizeable number of their countrymen.

The immense economic power of the landed classes and the uses to which they put that power played but a part in the growth of popular hostility towards them. As important in this process, if not more so, was the growing alienation of the landed classes from the common people. This alienation developed in part from the influence of the Union of 1707 upon the behaviour of the upper classes. The Union of 1707 effectively rendered Scotland a province of England, albeit a province with some unique, if insecure, privileges. Consequently, the landed classes and the ambitious of other classes tended to look to London for the glittering prizes, where previously they had looked to Edinburgh, and consciously sought to integrate themselves into English society. Those who could afford to, and those who couldn't afford not to, spent much of their time in London. The politically ambitious and the impecunious sought out marriage alliances with powerful English families. Moreover, they sought to ease the progress of their children in the British state by sending them to English schools and universities to learn English manners and language. In 1715 Sir John Clerk of Penicuik sent his eldest son, John, to Eton, because, he explained, "I thought it wou'd be an additional qualification to him that he understood the English Language, which since the Union wou'd always be necessary for a Scotsman in whatever station of life he might be in, but especially

83. The reasons for this will be discussed in Chapter 3, pp.206-214.

in any public character."⁸⁴ The natural consequence of this policy of anglicisation was the loss of familiarity with Scottish affairs and of sympathy with how the Scots expected their affairs to be handled. By the late eighteenth century few of the great aristocrats were familiar enough with Scotland to adequately manage the political system, and it was probably no coincidence that Henry Dundas, the political manager of Scotland from 1784 to 1806, came not from the nobility but from a legal family of gentry status.

Anglicisation may have been most marked among the aristocracy, but the idea that England offered, in most things, a model of excellence, deserving of imitation by Scotland, permeated the mind of the Scottish landed classes as a whole. Gradually a new 'polite' upper class culture based on English influences, emerged, which was far removed from that of the lower orders.⁸⁵ Enlarged rent rolls assisted its development, but its character was determined by the desire to imitate things English. Its progress was however gradual. For example, while the latter half of the century saw a sustained assault upon Scotticisms, both written and spoken, the literati, country gentlemen, judges and politicians still spoke in the "broad vernacular,"⁸⁶ and

84. ed. J.M. Gray. "Memoirs of the Life of Sir John Clerk of Penicuik, Baronet, Baron of the Exchequer, extracted by himself from his own journals 1676-1755". Publications of the Scottish History Society. 1st Series, XIII, 87. John Clerk's companion at Eton was his cousin, James Stuart, the second son of the fifth Earl of Galloway. IBID, 87.

85. See especially D. Craig. "Scottish Literature and the Scottish People 1680-1830" (London, 1961), Chapters 1 to 5, and also Smout, op cit, 285-291, and 480-514.

86. Sir H. Craik. "A Century of Scottish History from the days before the '45 to those within living memory." (Edinburgh and London, 1901) II, 61.

when Francis Jeffrey returned from Oxford in 1792 his newly acquired English accent "excited the surprise of his friends, and furnished others with ridicule for many years."⁸⁷ Nevertheless, there was an immense divide between the world of the late eighteenth century North British gentleman who delighted in Henry Mackenzie's 'Man of Feeling' and Hugh Blair's sermons, perused with pleasure 'The Mirror', 'The Lounger', and 'The Scots Magazine', sent his sons to English boarding schools, and studied intently James Beattie's 'Scotticisms' to rid himself of his provincial dialect, and that of the artisan or cottar who found his literary delights in Blind Harry's 'Wallace', preferred Thomas Boston's 'Fourfold State' to Blair's sermons, sent his sons to the parish school, and expressed himself in Scots without embarrassment.⁸⁸

Nowhere perhaps was this divide wider than in religion and nowhere certainly did it have more profound repercussions. The late seventeenth century had seen, in the writings of such as Descartes and Newton, the beginnings of an intellectual movement which was to reach its zenith in the mid-eighteenth century Enlightenment and which struck at the heart of Calvinism, the religio-philosophical system accepted by the vast majority of the lowland Scots. This movement, if the word will serve, attracted considerable and growing support

87. H. Cockburn. "Life of Lord Jeffrey with a selection from his correspondence". (Edinburgh, 1852), I, 46.

88. That the division between the 'two cultures' was neither total nor unbridgeable is well illustrated in the poetry and letters of Robert Burns. But while no area of Scottish life remained immune from the influences of the Enlightenment and the 'polite' culture associated with it, a distinction, however imperfect, may still be drawn between the culture of the upper classes and that of the lower orders.

among the intelligentsia and landed classes, and influenced the theology of the moderate clergy, but it won few adherents among the lower orders. Both Scots and foreigners observed and remarked upon the contrast between the rational religion of the upper classes and the Calvinism of the lower orders. An anonymous French visitor observed that while the "wild enthusiasm" of Calvinism "is now chiefly confined to the dregs of the people... all men of education and rank are disgusted with the religion of their country... [and] begin almost wholly to abandon public worship, which enthusiasm has rendered ridiculous; and to despise those doctrines the absurdity of which shocked their understanding."⁸⁹ The rational religion of the upper classes could appear virtually indistinguishable from irreligion, and excited alarm among both moderate and evangelical alike but for significantly different reasons. The Rev. John Erskine (1721-1803), one of the leaders of the evangelical party in the late eighteenth century, worried that "the contempt of religion, which has distinguished many in the upper ranks of life" would be "communicated to the lowest",⁹⁰ while moderates, such as William Craig (1709-1784), feared that the upper classes' "avowed indifference and contempt of all religion" would "rivet and increase the superstition [i.e. Calvinism] of the populace".⁹¹

89. Mons. B_u de. "Reflections on the Causes and Probable Consequences of the Late Revolution in France; with a view of the Ecclesiastical and Civil Constitution of Scotland, and of the progress of its Agriculture and Commerce. Translated from a series of Letters, written originally in French and dedicated to the National Assembly, by Mons. B_u de." (Edinburgh, 1790), 70 and 95.

90. J. Erskine. "The Fatal Consequences and General Sources of Anarchy. A Discourse on Isaiah, XXIV, 1-5" (Edinburgh, 1793), 43-44.

91. Quoted in I.D.L. Clark. "Moderatism and the Moderate Party in the Church of Scotland 1752-1805". Cambridge University Ph.D. Thesis 1963. p.12.

By the 1790s complaints about the irreligion of the upper classes were common place. The Rev. Archibald Singers of the united parishes of Fala and Soutra bitterly remarked that "in this part of the country, it is only fashionable for the lower classes of the people to attend church. The higher orders are above the vulgar prejudices of believing it necessary to worship the God of their fathers,"⁹² while in Kilwinning it was said that "Men of Rank and Fortune are very irregular, and even criminally negligent, in their attendance upon divine service on the Sabbath."⁹³ Moreover, the late eighteenth century saw the aristocracy begin to desert the General Assembly.⁹⁴

Given the strategic role played within Scottish society by both the Church of Scotland and the landed classes, it was perhaps inevitable that the religious divisions which separated the upper and lower orders would have produced tension, but this tension was immeasurably increased by the willingness of the landed classes to utilize the obnoxious Patronage Act of 1712 to present clergymen whose theological leanings and social attitudes were considered more appropriate to the new rational and 'polite' culture which they wished to cultivate. Moreover, the tensions were further heightened by the emergence of a dominant 'moderation' within the church itself, which sought to accommodate the church to the new culture and, hopefully, to lead and give direction to its development.

Moderatism, or at least proto-moderatism, had established itself as the dominant force within the Church of Scotland by the third decade of the eighteenth century, and most of the attitudes and policies which were to be adopted by the Moderate Party in the second

92. OSA, X, 605.

93. IBID, XI, 166.

94. Clark, op cit, 13.

half of the century were clearly evident by that period⁹⁵. The condemnation by the General Assembly of, firstly, the Auchterarder Creed in 1717 and, secondly, the 'Marrow of Modern Divinity' in 1720, was contrasted by the evangelicals with its lenient treatment of John Simson, Professor of Divinity in the University of Glasgow, who had been accused of teaching Arminianism and, later in 1726, Arianism. Disgruntlement was further fuelled by the General Assembly's attitude towards ecclesiastical patronage, and in particular by its appointment of Riding Committees in 1729 to induct unpopular presentees whom evangelical presbyteries would not deal with. Matters came to a head over the Assembly's Act anent Calls of 1732 which placed the right of election, in those cases where the lay patrons had not presented within six months, in the hands of elders and protestant heritors. Only twelve presbyteries had given their sanction to the overture of 1731 which proposed the measure, but the General Assembly, in defiance of its own Barrier Act of 1697, pressed ahead and enacted it. The act was fiercely resisted by a group of evangelicals, led by the Rev. Ebenezer Erskine (1680-1754) of Stirling, partly on the grounds that it did not exclude non-resident heritors or heritors who were not members of the Church of Scotland, but mainly because it did not vest the right of election in the congregation. As Ebenezer Erskine put it, in his sermon preached before the Synod of Perth and Stirling, 10 October, 1733, -

95. This and the subsequent paragraph are based upon the accounts given in J. McKerrrow "History of the Secession Church" (Edinburgh, 1839), I, 10-93, and in W. Ferguson "Scotland: 1689 to the Present". Vol. IV of the Edinburgh History of Scotland. (Edinburgh, 1968), 115-123.

"I can find no warrant from the word of God to confer the spiritual privileges of His house upon the rich beyond the poor, whereas by this Act, the man with the gold ring and gay clothing is preferred unto the man with the vile raiment and poor attire."⁹⁶

This sermon earned Erskine the rebuke and admonition of the Synod. His appeal to the General Assembly was rejected, and when Erskine and three supporters protested against this decision the Assembly refused **permission** for the protest to be read, censured the protestors, and ordered them to appear before the Assembly's Commission. The protestors refused to retract, were suspended, and, on 5 December 1733 met at Gairney Bridge, near Kinross, where they formed themselves into a separate presbytery entitled 'The Associate Presbytery'. The General Assembly subsequently adopted a policy of conciliation, but this failed to heal the breach, and in 1740 the seceders were formally deposed.

The Seceders were frequently referred to by outsiders as 'dissenters', but they were peculiar dissenters in that they adhered to the idea of a church establishment and were strictly orthodox in matters of church government, doctrine and worship. They regarded themselves as the poor, persecuted, bleeding remnant of the true church forced to defend orthodoxy from outside the established church because such a defence was no longer possible from within. The protestors, as they were then, declared on 16 November, 1733, that -

"notwithstanding of our being cast out from ministerial communion with the Established Church of Scotland, we still hold communion with all and everyone who desire, with us, to adhere to the principles of the true presbyterian covenanted

96. Quoted in Ferguson, op cit, 123.

Church of Scotland, in her doctrine, worship, government,
and discipline."⁹⁷

The history of the Secession subsequent to its formation cannot here ^eby chronicled, but the essential point is that its strict orthodoxy and defence of congregational rights in the question of church presentations proved popular with the masses. Thus, despite the financial and psychological difficulties involved in breaking with the Church of Scotland, the Secession grew apace in the years following their inaugural meeting at Gairney Bridge and by 1792 there were 287 seceding 'meetings' throughout Scotland comprising 127 antiburgher, 105 burgher and 55 relief congregations.⁹⁸ The total membership of the Secession in the 1790s is not known with certainty, but it seems probable that Lord Advocate Robert Dundas' estimate of 150,000 would not be very far wide of the mark.⁹⁹ Thus, it may be estimated that by the 1790s the Secession held the allegiance of approximately 10% of the population; a figure which would be significantly higher if one were only to refer to the population of lowland Scotland where the seceding churches were, at that time, exclusively located.

Opposition to the "spirit of lordly dominion" within the Church of Scotland was not however limited to the ranks of the Secession. A long and largely unsuccessful rearguard action in defence of doctrinal orthodoxy and congregational rights was fought from within the

97. McKerrow, op cit, I, 84.

98. These figures are based upon those given in W. Mackelvie "Annals and Statistics of the United Presbyterian Church" (Edinburgh, 1873), 33-40.

99. Robert Dundas to Robert Saunders Dundas, 14 November 1807. National Library of Scotland. (henceforth cited as NLS). Melville Papers. MSS 8, f 203. Robert Dundas was referring to the situation in the 1790s.

established church by the aptly named 'Popular Party'. Indeed, while seceding ministers were not slow to find fault with the moderate clergy, the most withering criticism came from an evangelical minister of the Church of Scotland, the Rev. John Witherspoon (1723-1794), whose brilliant satire entitled 'Ecclesiastical Characteristics' laid bare all the ugly features of moderatism. Witherspoon's satire, as A.L. Drummond has pointed out, exposed the moderates' "gentlemanliness as sycophancy, their culture as paganism, their virtue as self-righteousness."¹⁰⁰ Tongue-in-cheek the reverend doctor offered his readers the 'Athenian Creed' as the summation of moderate belief, -

"I believe in the beauty and comely proportions of Dame Nature, and in Almighty Fate, her only parent and guardian; for it hath been most graciously obliged (blessed be its name) to make us all very good.

I believe that the Universe is a large machine, wound up from everlasting, and consisting of an infinite number of links and chains, each in a progressive motion towards the zenith of perfection... that I myself am a little glorious piece of clockwork, a wheel within a wheel, or rather a pendulum within this grand machine, swinging hither and thither by the different impulses of fate and destiny... I believe that there is no ill in the Universe, ... that those things vulgarly called sins are only errors in the judgment, and foils to set off the beauty of nature, or patches to adorn her face; that the whole race of intelligent beings, even the devils themselves (if there be any) shall finally be

100. A.L. Drummond. "Witherspoon of Gifford and American Presbyterianism", in "Records of the Scottish Church History Society", XII, Part III, (1956), 191.

happy; so that Judas Iscariot is by this time a glorified saint...

In fine, I believe in the divinity of L.S. [Lord Shaftesbury], the saintship of Marcus Antoninus, the perspecuity of A_e [Aristotle] and the perpetual duration of Mr. H_n's [Hutchison's] works, notwithstanding their present tendency towards oblivion. Amen."¹⁰¹

The eighth of "several maxims upon which moderate men conduct themselves" according to Witherspoon was that "In church-settlements... the only thing to be regarded, is, who the patron, and the great and noble heritors are for; the inclination of the common people are to be utterly despised."¹⁰² In Witherspoon's, as in many others', eyes, the patronage issue was a class as well as a theological one, with the moderate clergy cast in the role of the sycophantic allies of the landed interest. "They [i.e. the evangelicals] please the people; we [i.e. the moderates] please, at least endeavour to please, those of high rank... we have endeavoured to ingratiate ourselves with them, by softness and complaisance, and by going considerable lengths with them in their freedom."¹⁰³ He cuttingly added that "when we shall have driven away the whole common people to the Seceders, who alone are fit for them, and captivated the hearts of the gentry to a love of our solitary temples, they may... be pleased to allow us more stipends, because we shall have nothing to do but to spend them."¹⁰⁴

101. J. Witherspoon "Ecclesiastical Characteristics: or, the Arcana of Church Policy. Being an humble attempt to open up the mystery of moderation: Wherein is shewn a plain and easy way of attaining to the Character of a Moderate Man, as at present in repute in the Church of Scotland". 5th edn. (Edinburgh, 1763), 40-41

102. IBID, 44.

103. IBID, 53.

104. IBID, 66.

It has been argued that "any attempt to interpret the opposition between the two parties [i.e. moderate and evangelical] in terms of 'class struggle' is futile",¹⁰⁵ but, while it is true that both the Popular and Moderate parties recruited among men with similar social and educational backgrounds, such a view ignores some very pertinent facts. Not only did evangelicals and seceders tend to portray the dispute in class terms, but virtually all the evidence available suggests that the moderates had little support among the lower orders, that their appeal lay almost exclusively with the landed and professional classes, and that the lower orders steadfastly supported the cause of Calvinist orthodoxy and congregational rights. Moreover, the secession was essentially a popular rather than a clerical movement. Seceding clergymen did not go out on proselytising missions; they waited until they were 'called' by disgruntled congregations. The call when it came, came not from heritors but from artisans and small tenant farmers. As McKerrow, the historian of the Secession, pointed out with, if anything, some measure of understatement, "a considerable proportion of those who left the Establishment, and joined the ranks of the Secession, were persons in humble circumstances of life" whose poverty was reflected in their ministers' "very inadequate" stipends.¹⁰⁶ Seceding congregations were composed of 'Christ's poor' and the landed classes were only noticeable by their absence.

105. Clark, op cit, Appendix II, 'The Two Cultures', 372.

106. McKerrow, op cit, I, 402-403.

The patronage question lay at the centre of the conflict between popular calvinism and moderatism. The conflict was about much else as well, but patronage was the cause célèbre on which the conflict focused. Indeed, patronage disputes, as R. Small demonstrated, lay behind virtually every individual secession from the Church of Scotland.¹⁰⁷ The patronage issue was certainly theological, but its wider socio-political ramifications were rarely lost sight of during the great debate which raged on throughout much of the century. The Rev. Archibald Bruce (1746-1816), Antiburgher Professor of Divinity and minister of Whitburn, for example, stated that -

"Both in the first and second reformations [1560 and 1638-43], a number of the nobility there acquired great fame and power, by zealously espousing the cause of popular liberty and reformation, in opposition to the tyranny of the crown and church united. But this honourable cause they have long since deserted: they have conspired with the court party in England and the despotic clergy of Scotland [i.e. the Moderates] to oppress the Presbyterian Church, by the rigorous exercise of ecclesiastical patronage, to the total abolition of the constitutional right of free elections: the burden of the struggle for liberty and reform, against all those powerful interests combined, is now wholly devolved on the inferior and poorer sort of the people, with whom the former or higher class have now completely lost their credit and influence. Knowing that they have in a great manner transferred their attentions, their patriotism, their hopes and their affections to England, the Commons of Scotland can no longer honour their peers with confidence, nor do they

107. R. Small. "History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church from 1733 to 1900". 2 volumes (Edinburgh, 1904), passim. See also, W. Mackelvie, op cit, 11-12.

give themselves great concern about anything relating to them."¹⁰⁸

The Rev. Patrick Bannerman (1715-1790), the parish minister of Salton, argued the case against patronage in almost exclusively political terms. "The law of patronage", he claimed in his revealingly titled pamphlet 'An Address to the People of Scotland, on Ecclesiastical and Civil Liberty', "so far from being salutary, can subserve no purpose but to increase the power of an aristocracy already too powerful, and to add to that system of corruption become already far too prevalent."¹⁰⁹ Bannerman echoed Bruce in arguing that the aristocracy, in league with the despotic interests who governed from London, had overthrown the balance of the constitution, depriving the people of some of their rights and threatening the establishment of a tyranny. The much boasted constitutional liberties of the free-born Briton were, he claimed, an empty shell, a mockery, and he added, indulging himself in rhetorical hyperbole, that "Perhaps a greater instance of oppression does not occur in Turkey, than what is practised in this country."¹¹⁰ He explained that, -

"Since the year 1707 you have been excluded that proportion of liberty which hath been enjoyed by England, in consequence of a compact made by your fathers... A despotic aristocracy has continued since that period to controul and overawe you,

108. A. Bruce. "Reflections on Freedom of Writing, and the Impropriety of Attempting to Suppress it by Penal Laws. Occasioned by a Late Proclamation Against Seditious Publications, and the Measures Consequent upon it; Viewed Chiefly in the Aspect they Bear to Religious Liberty, and Ecclesiastical Reform. By a North British Protestant." (N.P., 1794), 88.

109. P. Bannerman. "An Address to the People of Scotland, on Ecclesiastical and Civil Liberty." (Edinburgh, 1782), 15.

110. IBID, 21.

and with all that boast of liberty, which hath been so loud and clamorous, the middle and lower ranks of this country have hardly been able to taste the sweets of freedom. The members of an aristocracy have monopolised the blessings of government, and carefully retained in their pay a chosen band of their inferiors, who have celebrated the praises of a government, the benefits of which were confined to themselves and their employers."¹¹¹

Thus Bannerman linked the demand for the abolition of patronage with a demand for a radical extension of the franchise. At bottom, the right to elect ministers and parliamentary representatives was determined by the answers given to the same questions. As Bannerman expressed it himself, -

"Have our Lords and Esquires an exclusive right to liberty? Are they the only useful members of society? Is freedom circumscribed by titles and by birth? Are the great the only wise and worthy citizens? Is merit necessarily connected with fortune? And have all the learning, penetration, sagacity, and virtue of human nature taken up their residence with wealth and honours?"¹¹²

The language of the patronage debate was frequently couched in terms of a conflict between aristocracy and democracy, between landed power and the 'people', but while many anti-patronage writers seemed to imply an advocacy of democratic rights in state as well as church, few if any explicitly articulated such a position. Bannerman

111. *IBID*, 19-20.

112. *IBID*, 21.

for example, despite the seemingly democratic implications of much of what he argued, stated that he wrote in support of the rights of "merchants, tradesmen, farmers, and the clergy of various denominations", whom he described as composing "the middle ranks of men."¹¹³

In 1782, the same year as Bannerman's 'Address' was published, the first stirrings of a political movement,¹¹⁴ the object of which was to obtain political power for these "middle ranks of men", could be detected. The emergence of the Burgh Reform movement owed something to the mood of political introspection which followed on the disastrous failure of British arms in America, but it owed much more to the growing self-confidence of the middling ranks which reflected their growing economic power and importance within Scottish society. The immediate stimulus behind the formation of the movement was a series of letters,

113. IBID, 22.

114. Complaints about the maladministration and corruption of the Scottish royal burghs predated 1782. For example, Henry Home, Lord Kames, wrote in 1774 that "The unhappy consequences of leaving magistrates without any check or control, are too visible to be disguised. The revenues of a royal burgh are seldom laid out of the good of the town, but in making friends to the knot who are in possession of the magistracy". He added that "The greatest evil of all, respects the choice of their representative in parliament. A habit of riot and intemperence makes them fit subjects to be corrupted, by every adventurer who is willing to lay out money for purchasing a seat in parliament. Hence the infamous practice of bribery at elections, which tends not only to corrupt the whole mass of the people, but, which is still more dreadful, tends to fill the House of Commons with men of dissolute manners, void of probity and honour." Henry Home, Lord Kames. "Sketches of the History of Man" (Edinburgh, 1774), II, Appendix II, "Government of Royal Boroughs in Scotland", 494-495. Prior to 1782 these complaints had not led to the formation of a movement to reform the royal burghs.

under the nom de plume of Zeno, first published in the Caledonian Mercury.¹¹⁵ The author, Thomas McGrugar, a wealthy Edinburgh merchant, expressed the bourgeoisie's self-importance and self-confidence and put their case clearly and succinctly. In Zeno's second letter of 24 December 1782, McGrugar informs us that -

"To admit the dregs of the populace to a share in government, would be both imprudent and improper. They are disqualified by a natural ignorance and hebetude, which render them unfit to be their own directors, and, therefore, they must be directed by others... But men in the middle ranks of life, who generally constitute the majority of every free community, cannot be excluded from a voice in the appointment of their representatives, because this would be to deny them the right of self-government, for which they are qualified by their knowledge and extent of property, which must give them a weight in every free state, and a title to a share in the legislation."¹¹⁶

McGrugar's views corresponded exactly with those of the vast majority of his fellow burghesses. The Burgh Reform movement grew rapidly during 1783, winning widespread support among the urban middle classes, and by March 1784 it was sufficiently strong and well organised

115. The Caledonian Mercury, 23 and 28 December, 1782; 6 and 22 January, and 5 February, 1783. These letters were subsequently published in a pamphlet entitled "The Letters of Zeno, to the Citizens of Edinburgh, on the present Mode of Electing a Member of Parliament for that City. To which is prefixed, a Letter to the Right Honourable William Pitt, Chancellor of the Exchequer, on the Political State of the Scottish Burghs, in which a Change is Suggested on Constitutional Principles." (N.P., 1783)

116. The Caledonian Mercury, 28 December 1782. "The Letters of Zeno", 14.

to hold its first "general convention of delegates" in Edinburgh.¹¹⁷ This convention, attended by delegates from reform groups in 33 of the 66 royal burghs, was composed "chiefly of wealthy and respectable burghesses", some "landed gentlemen residing in the neighbourhood of the Burghs", and a group of lawyers with strong opposition Whig loyalties.¹¹⁸ The convention declared itself in favour of extending both the municipal and parliamentary franchises to all resident burghesses, and remitted the draughts of two bills to that purpose to a standing committee for revision.¹¹⁹ By 1785 the commitment to parliamentary reform had been laid aside, because the defeat of the parliamentary reform movement in England "rendered it altogether unreasonable to expect that it would be granted in Scotland",¹²⁰ but the commitment to municipal reform remained strong. The General Convention, which met on 19 October 1785 and which was attended by

117. A. Fletcher. "A Memoir concerning the origin and progress of the reform proposed in the internal government of the Royal Burghs of Scotland; which was first brought under public discussion in 1732. To which is added, the Bill for reforming the internal government of the burghs, prepared by the committee of the convention of delegates appointed by the burghesses of the royal burghs of Scotland, approved by the convention, and which was twice read in the Commons House of Parliament. And also, an illustration of the principles of that Bill, and continuation thereof, containing a refutation of the objection against reform founded on the Treaty of Union. To which are further added, the substance of the reports of specific grievances." (Edinburgh 1819), 14-15.

118. IBID, 15.

119. IBID, 20-21.

120. IBID, 29.

delegates from 49 royal burghs, approved a bill to be presented to Parliament which sought to extend the municipal franchise to all resident burgesses carrying on trade or manufacture within the royal burghs.¹²¹ The bill was drawn up with the express desire to guard "Against the great and real evil of universal suffrage, by establishing reasonable qualifications of property and respectability of condition in the electors."¹²² Thus, the bill sought to exclude "from all right of voting at such elections, all honorary burgesses, town or trades servants, all domestic or menial servants, all persons receiving charity from the funds of any incorporation, or any other charitable institution."¹²³ In short, the Scottish bourgeoisie sought to enfranchise themselves while maintaining the traditional exclusion of the lower orders from the political process. Events were to prove that their fear of democracy was far greater than their desire to reform the old regime. If the democratic cause was to triumph in Scotland it would have to do so without the assistance of the vast majority of the bourgeoisie.

The progress of the burgh reform movement was so slow as to be, at times, virtually imperceptible. In part this was due to the unco-operative behaviour of the town councils and magistrates who dragged their heels in supplying Parliament with required evidence, but in the main it was owing to the incompetence of the reformers' parliamentary spokesman, Richard B. Sheridan, whose ham-fisted attempts to forward the business were easily countered by that master of parliamentary procedure, Henry Dundas. On 18 April 1792 Sheridan

121. IBID, 31-33.

122. IBID, 34-35.

123. IBID, 33-34. "Trades servants" were journeymen and apprentices. "Menial servants" included labourers.

moved that the House of Commons appoint a committee to examine the evidence relating to burgh reform and supported his motion with an imprudent speech in which he stated that "we had at this day nothing in it [i.e. the constitution] that was beautiful, but what had not been forced from tyrants, and taken from the usurpations of despotism."¹²⁴ Warming to his theme, he reminded a House that needed no such reminder that "there is a spirit of inquiry issued forth among all classes of men; it increased every day and every hour", and argued that Parliament should make concessions to the new spirit of radicalism in order to avoid the threat of revolution.¹²⁵

Sheridan's ill-advised association of the burgh reform movement with political radicalism, which ran contrary to the efforts of the burgh reformers themselves, alarmed his fellow parliamentarians. John Rolle spoke for many when he replied that "the hon. gentleman had delivered one of the most inflammatory, wicked, and dangerous speeches he had ever heard",¹²⁶ while Sir James St. Clair Erskine drew the attention of any English members who may have failed to realise the implications of what the burgh reformers were proposing by stating "that the principle laid down for altering the constitution of the Scotch burghs would go to the alteration of all similar constitutions in England."¹²⁷ Sheridan had badly misjudged the mood of the House of Commons and his motion was roundly defeated.

124. "The Parliamentary History of England, from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803" (London, 1816-1818) (hereafter cited as Parl. Hist.), XXIX, 1188.

125. IBID, 1190-1191.

126. IBID, 1203.

127. IBID, 1203.

Years of hard work, organising local groups of reformers, sending delegates to conventions in Edinburgh, obtaining signatures for petitions, collecting evidence of mal-administration and corruption, and orchestrating a parliamentary campaign, had seemingly left the burgh reformers as far away from achieving their objective as ever. In short, the burgh reform movement faced a crisis. Should the burgh reformers accept that their cause was inextricably linked in the political nation's mind with the sort of radicalism they would never countenance, and should they therefore cease their activities until radicalism had been defeated and the conservative mind returned to equilibrium? Should they attempt to retrieve the situation by dissociating themselves from Paineite radicalism and convincing the nation of their constitutionalism? Or, should they conclude that the previous mode of proceeding had failed irretrievably, and should they therefore put their weight behind the parliamentary reform movement which was beginning to revive in England and which some of their parliamentary allies, the Foxite Whigs, were attempting to give a 'moderate' direction to? The answers given to these various questions would do more than determine the immediate fate of the burgh reform movement, they would also heavily influence the very nature and consequently the prospects of any renewed campaign for parliamentary reform. If the burgh reformers were won over to parliamentary reform during the summer of 1792, a reform which they had after all only temporarily abandoned for tactical reasons in 1785, the movement would gain not only an important accession to its numerical strength¹²⁸ and

128, 'The numbers subscribing the petitions to Parliament in support of burgh reform may be taken as a rough guide to the numerical strength of the burgh reformers. The petitions presented to Parliament were signed by "about nine thousand persons, burgesses and heritors in burghs". A. Fletcher, *op cit*, 79. This figure seems to be an accurate representation of the facts, see *Parl. Hist.*, XXVIII, 222.

much experience and some expertise in organising extra-parliamentary agitation, it would also be more likely to display that 'moderation' that could alone prevent any head-on conflict with the government and the political nation. Put another way, the answer to the question of whether or not the burgh reformers would support parliamentary reform in 1792 would largely determine whether the parliamentary reform movement would aim simply to enfranchise the property owning, 'respectable', educated middling ranks of society or whether it would press the claims of the artisans, mechanics and labourers to a share in the political process. Bearing in mind the fact that the burgh reformers had set their face resolutely against enfranchising the lower-orders it seems clear that if they had joined the Friends of the People then historians would have been unable to write about a 'democratic movement' in Scotland in the 1790s.¹²⁹

The end of the disastrous American war in 1782 saw not only the first stirrings of the burgh reform movement, but also a revival of interest in county reform after a lapse of six years. The Scottish county franchise, as is well known, was extremely exclusive and open to corruption. The vote was vested not in land but in the superiority over land. Those who possessed the superiority of land valued at £400 Scots of annual rent or at forty shillings of 'old extent' were entitled to the franchise. Large landowners, utilising the ingenuity of their lawyers, exploited the imperfections of this system to create 'nominal and fictitious' votes¹³⁰ and build up large electoral

129. The best account of the burgh reform movement in print remains Archibald Fletcher's "Memoir", which should be consulted as the essential starting point for any study of the movement.

130. See C.E. Adam (ed). "View of the Political State of Scotland in the last century. A confidential report on the political opinions, family connections, or personal circumstances of the 2662 county voters in 1788". (Edinburgh, 1887) Introduction, XXII-XXVI, where the method of creating such votes and the history of the unsuccessful attempts to check the practice are succinctly described.



'interests' which could dominate county politics by overwhelming the voting strength of the smaller, independent freeholders. By 1790 the thirty three counties of Scotland could muster only 2,665 voters between them of whom the incredible number of 1,318 were 'fictitious'.¹³¹ County politics was, with very few exceptions, a game dominated by the great aristocratic families.

The county reformers' objective was to redraw the rules of the game in order to enable the smaller landowners to play a larger part. To that end nothing radical was proposed. Some sections of reform opinion would have been content with legislation to prevent the creation of nominal votes, while others went slightly further and proposed that, in addition to such legislation, the franchise should be extended to smaller landowners excluded under the terms of the 1681 act. No significant body of county reformers suggested that anyone other than a landed proprietor should be enfranchised. The most ambitious scheme proposed that proprietors of land valued at £100 Scots of annual rent should be enfranchised. One of its advocates, Robert Fergusson, Junior, of Craigdarroch, stated that the minimum qualification should be reduced to that -

"which now entitled heritors to be commissioners of supply.

Nothing would in my opinion, contribute so much to the purity of the representation. The commissioners of supply are placed in that rank, which forms, in every country, the most virtuous, and the most independent part of the community. They are equally removed from the extremes of poverty and riches, and equally free from the vices and corruptions of either. They are the men who are the least liable to be acted upon by

131. Meikle, op cit, 10.

influence of any kind. Their fortunes are independent, in the station of life in which they are placed. They are above the reach of the pecuniary bribe; their habits of life protect them from the influence of offices and employments... To whom else, then, can we look for the genuine and unbiassed opinions of the sound part of the community in this country?"¹³²

The county reformers were essentially conservative men anxious to restore "the purity of the representation" of property in the House of Commons and to restore thereby the balance of the constitution. They, like their more radical fellow reformers in the burghs, had no desire to enfranchise the lower orders or to upset the old assumptions which linked property with political rights. In the county reformers' eyes "the progress of corruption" rendered it "dangerous to extend indiscriminately to all the privilege of voting".¹³³ It did not take a revolution in France to teach the propertied classes, both within and without the political nation, to fear democracy.

There was much that separated the burgh and county reformers from the radicals of the 1790s. While the burgh reformers recruited principally among the wealthy burgesses of the towns and the county reformers obtained most of their support from the small independent freeholders and the commissioners of supply, the radical rank and file was composed of artisans, mechanics and small shopkeepers. While the burgh reformers sought to enfranchise the property owning, educated and 'respectable' business classes and the county reformers sought to check the corrupting power of government and the great landowners by

132. R. Fergusson Junior of Craigdarroch. "The Proposed Reform of the Counties of Scotland Impartially Examined: with Observations on the Conduct of the Delegates" (Edinburgh, 1792), 12-13.

133. IBID, 3.

increasing that of the 'virtuous' small landowners, the radicals aimed to shift the balance of political power irreversibly towards the lower orders. Such indeed were the differences that none of these various movements would co-operate far less unite with one another. Yet the unity which the old Whig school of *historians*¹³⁴ saw as linking, however loosely, those movements together cannot simply be dismissed as a figment of their imaginations.

As we shall see¹³⁵, some radicals shared with the moderate reformers, and in particular with the county reformers, the belief that the boasted Whig tripartite constitution, with its separation of powers between King, Lords and Commons, had been undermined by a tide of corruption which had rendered the House of Commons incapable of performing its historic role of checking the power of the King and the House of Lords. It was believed that the balance of the constitution had been profoundly upset by the growing 'influence' of the executive and the aristocracy over the House of Commons and that the constitutional liberties of the subject were thereby threatened. The various groups of reformers disagreed on how the balance was to be restored, but they agreed that it had been upset and that some measure of parliamentary reform was required to remedy the situation. It was this measure of agreement which led the Scottish radicals to believe that it might be possible to achieve an alliance between the various reform movements. The 'Report of the Committee entrusted with Preparations for a General Convention' recommended that the Scottish radicals address the burgh and county reformers "stating that the

134. For example, Meikle, op cit, W.L. Mathieson, "The Awakening of Scotland. A History from 1747 to 1797" (Glasgow, 1910), and G.S. Veitch. "The Genesis of Parliamentary Reform" (London, 1913).

135. See Chapter 2,

partial reforms sought by them could not, though obtained, resist the corruption of the state, but would be swallowed up of it and thus instead of weakening strengthen it."¹³⁶ There was undoubtedly something very naive about the radicals' belief that the burgh and county reformers could be persuaded to support radical reform, but it is nonetheless possible to understand how they came to hold it. There was a greater degree of ideological affinity between the radicals of the 1790s and the burgh and county reformers than modern historians have sometimes allowed.

The Scottish radical reform movement, at least at first, was not the exclusive preserve of Paineite artisans, but rather an insecure alliance of quite separate interest groups, including 'advanced' Whigs, seceders, rational dissenters, disgruntled businessmen, and, most importantly of all, artisans and shop-keepers¹³⁷, whose unity was based upon a common dissatisfaction with the workings of the political system and a common belief that a radical extension of the franchise would improve their lot. Ideologically their unity could most easily, and most safely, be expressed in the familiar language of Whig constitutionalism. We must now turn our attention to how this alliance was formed.

136. 'Report of the Committee entrusted with preparations for a General Convention'. Undated paper in J.C.26/280.

137. I do not mean to suggest that all members of these groups joined the movement, only that significant numbers did so.

CHAPTER II

The Origins of the Society of the Friends of the People

In discussing the background to the rise of the Scottish Democratic Movement the French Revolution was mentioned only in passing. Such treatment may appear dangerously misguided to historians accustomed to viewing the political history of the 1790s through the bright light cast by the exploding star that was revolutionary France, yet, whatever its undoubted importance in influencing the history of nations beyond the boundaries of France, the fact remains that the French Revolution did not create the social or political tensions that beset late eighteenth century Scotland.

Nevertheless the French Revolution lies at the centre of any study of the Scottish Democratic Movement of the 1790s. Regarded by both contemporaries and subsequent generations alike as the single most important event of the period, it dominated men's thoughts and influenced their actions to an extraordinary extent. Men differed on how to interpret the Revolution and these differences became more pronounced and more bitter as the Revolution developed, but all agreed that they were witnessing events of the utmost importance. The Revolution attracted virtually everyone's attention: newspapers responded to the almost insatiable demands of their readership for news by providing long reports on developments in France as they unfolded¹, private correspondence and conversation frequently turned

1. The Caledonian Mercury which devoted as much as one of its four pages to French news was not untypical.

to the amazing scenes taking place across the English Channel², and men's minds concentrated on the implications these scenes held for the future of mankind.³ The Revolution was an omnipresent influence, a constant factor in everyone's lives, and contemporaries could no more avoid it than they could avoid death. All debate on parliamentary reform, irrespective of the wishes of some reformers, was conducted against the backcloth of the French Revolution, for the simple reason that the greatness of the principles involved in the Revolution transcended or were made to transcend the narrow national boundaries of France. The Revolution raised the hopes of the idealistic and the discontented, and heightened the fears of the contented because contemporaries well realised the international dimension of the great historical play being acted out in France. Lord Cockburn's (1779-1854) comment on the impact of the French Revolution is oft-quoted, but remains apposite -

"Everything rung, and was connected with the Revolution in France; which for above twenty years, was, or was made, the all in all. Everything, not this or that thing, but literally everything was soaked in this one event."⁴

2. Henry Cockburn, who was born in 1779, remembered that "Grown up people talked at this time of nothing but the French Revolution." H. Cockburn. "Memorials of his Time". (Edinburgh, 1856), 45.

3. For example, the wife of Archibald Fletcher, the prominent burgh reformer, recalled that "At this time, 1791 and 1792, the grand principles of the French Revolution occupied the thoughts and stirred the passions of all thinking and feeling men." E. Fletcher. "Autobiography of Mrs. Fletcher with letters and other family memorials." (Edinburgh, 1875), 64.

4. H. Cockburn, op cit, 80.

The radical reform movement in Scotland did not however spring from its blocks in response to a starter's gun fired in Paris in 1789. The history of its origins is both long and complex, and although some of the material relating to this history is already well known it is essential to a proper understanding of the movement that its origins be traced in some detail.

Although it is clear that from the start some conservatives had serious doubts and anxieties about the French Revolution⁵, it is equally clear that the majority of the political nation welcomed it warmly. An anonymous French visitor to Scotland in 1790 concluded, after canvassing what he considered to be informed opinion, that "the conduct of the Assembly in France, among the more enlightened part of the community, meets with great approbation. The stability of our infant constitution is that alone concerning which they entertain a doubt."⁶ With the exception of the 'Edinburgh Advertiser', which as

5. Dr. James Beattie (1735-1803), Professor of Moral Philosophy at Marischall College, Aberdeen, declared on 14 September 1789, that "French affairs become every day 'confusion worse confounded'... it is plain that the generality are actuated by a levelling principle of the worst kind; which one is sorry to see likely to extend its influence beyond the limits of France." Beattie's disapproval was shared by his fellow north-easterner, the staunchly independent Tory, Lord Fife, who wrote from London, 6 January 1790, that "We are full of French and I am sure that they are here to do no good. People doing so much mischief at home are dangerous visitors in another family." That such outspokenly alarmist opinion was not in any way limited to the notoriously conservative north-east, or to supporters of Pitt's administration, is made clear by a letter from the Whig Gilbert Elliot of Minto (1751-1814) to his wife, 24 April 1790, in which he writes that "Burke has a pamphlet, just coming out on France, and the relation of that subject to England [i.e. Britain], which I passed the forenoon in reading yesterday, and I like it very much, and think it will do both us and the rest of the world a great deal of good." Sir W. Forbes. "An Account of the Life and Writings of James Beattie, LL.D. Late Professor of Moral Philosophy and Logic in the Marischall College and University of Aberdeen. Including many of his original letters." (Edinburgh, 1806), II, 250. Letter CCXIII. ed A. and H. Taylor. "Lord Fife and his Factor, being the correspondence of James second Lord Fife, 1729-1809." (London, 1925), 207. Countess of Minto. "Life and Letters of Sir Gilbert Elliot First Earl of Minto from 1751 to 1806, when his public life in Europe was closed by his appointment to the Vice-Royalty of India. Edited by his Great Niece the Countess of Minto", 1, (London, 1874), 357-358.

6. Mons. B-de, op cit, 6.

early as July 1789 had been commenting upon "the anarchy and confusion now reigning in France"⁷, the Edinburgh press did not view the Revolution with hostility. Some of the press indeed, gave it a positive welcome. The influential and conservative 'Scots Magazine', for example, published essays and poems in praise of the Revolution. One such poem, published in September 1789 and entitled 'The Bastille', stated that -

"There's not an English heart that would not leap

To hear that ye [i.e. the Bastille] were fall'n at last"⁸

Most tellingly of all, perhaps, the first appearance of Edmund Burke's 'Reflections on the Revolution in France' won in Scotland, as in England⁹, little acclaim. The criticism which the work provoked from radical and reformist Whig alike is at this stage of little importance. What is of greater import is the criticism levelled at Burke from within the Scottish establishment. The immensely respected former head of the Moderate party in the Church of Scotland, the Rev. Dr. William Robertson (1721-1793) denounced the 'Reflections' as "ravings"¹⁰, while his fellow Moderate, the Rev. Dr. Thomas Somerville (1741-1830), minister of Jedburgh parish and, subsequently, a noted historian of

7. The Edinburgh Advertiser, 17-21 July 1789. Subsequent developments did nothing to persuade the "Advertiser" to change its mind, and in November 1789, it commented that the Revolution "has already been attended with much bloodshed and invasion of private property, and with such cruelties and enormities as are a disgrace to human nature - and, after a state of the greatest anarchy for several months, their constitution is yet far from being completed or established." IBID, 10-13 November 1789.

8. The Scots Magazine, LI, 444.

9. See A. Cobban. "The Debate on the French Revolution 1789-1800" (London, 1950), 10, and also A. Goodwin. "The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the age of the French Revolution." (London, 1979), 135.

10. H.G. Graham. "Scottish Men of Letters in the Eighteenth Century." (London, 1901), 93.

Britain's own Glorious Revolution, commented that Burke's "eloquent publication... appeared to me to contain the ranting declamations of aristocratic pride and exuberant genius, rather than to flow from the dictates of sober reflection and a sound and liberal understanding."¹¹

The 'Edinburgh Herald', which had been founded in March 1790 as a ministerialist newspaper, published a hostile review of the 'Reflections' by one 'Brutus'¹², which was subsequently republished in that periodical of the Scottish governing classes, the 'Scots Magazine'¹³. Brutus was no radical. He agreed with Burke's treatment of the "great leading truths of our constitution" and of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, but he took him to task for his views on the French Revolution. While, he argued, the "English constitution had only suffered from some dilapidations which it was not difficult to repair [in 1688]. The French was rotten at the foundation, and it required a great deal of pulling down to remedy the mischief".¹⁴ The justified use of revolutionary violence in France had, he believed, "not, perhaps, been so frequent, or so great as might have been expected in a period of such commotion and tumult. The force that could wrench its sceptre from despotism could not be exerted with the ease and smoothness of regular and ordinary power".¹⁵ With unconscious

11. T. Somerville. "My Own Life and Times 1741-1814" (Edinburgh, 1861), 264

12. 'Brutus' has been identified as Henry Mackenzie (1745-1831), the lawyer, novelist, and friend of Henry Dundas. H.W. Thompson. "A Scottish Man of Feeling: some account of Henry Mackenzie, Esq. of Edinburgh and of the Golden Age of Burns and Scott." (Oxford University Press, 1931), 253.

13. The Scots Magazine, L11, 576-580.

14. IBID, 577.

15. IBID, 577.

irony this conservative reviewer anticipated Paine in criticising Burke for giving undue weight to the cruelties of the revolutionaries, and asked, what of "those wretches on whom the former government wreaked its vengeance uncontrolled?"¹⁶ Louis XVI had been represented by Burke as a mild and benificent ruler, "but", Brutus commented, "the miseries of millions of his subjects make no figure in his history."¹⁷ If the French king had brought about his own downfall and merited the fate of which Burke complained, so too, he argued, had the French nobility and clergy. Of the nobility, Brutus wrote -

"That such a body should have shrunk into annihilation without a struggle is pretty strong evidence of its having lost, by some demerit that influence which it should have had in the country; evidence that it held the people in a vassalage intolerably oppressive, and had exercised all tyranny without having gained any of the feudal attachment... A similar argument may be brought with regard to the church."¹⁸

16. IBID, 577.

17. IBID 577.

18. IBID, 578.

These criticisms of Burke¹⁹ and the welcome given to the French Revolution by many Scotsmen of a relatively conservative disposition are not indicative of any political inconsistency, but rather reveal a genuine belief, or as events developed, a strained hope that the French would content themselves with imitating the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Such a view reflected both a serious misjudgement of the forces at work within France and the enormous complacency of the Scottish political nation, which had celebrated the centenary of the Revolution of 1688 with an orgy of self-congratulation, boasting

19. The impression should not be given that Burke's "Reflections" met with universal disapproval in Scotland. As has already been noted the Whig Gilbert Elliot of Minto thought highly of the 'Reflections', see fn5. The ultra conservative philosopher and poet Dr. James Beattie also praised Burke's great work. "In Mr. Burke's book", he wrote, "are many expressions, that might perhaps, with equal propriety, have been less warm: but against these it is not easy to guard, when a powerful eloquence is animated by an ardent mind... But the spirit and principles of the work, I, as a lover of my king and of the constitution of my country, do highly approve; and within my very narrow circle of influence I shall not fail to recommend it. It came very seasonably; at a time, when a considerable party among us are labouring to introduce into this island the anarchy of France". "The Letters of James Beattie, LL.D. chronologically arranged from Sir W. Forbes' collection." (London, 1820), II, Letter CL1, Beattie to the Duchess of Gordon, 7 March 1791, pp 187-188. The same fulsome praise is to be found in a review of the "Reflections" published in the "Edinburgh Evening Courant" on 6 November 1790. "On the whole", it stated, "we consider this publication as among the most useful and the most splendid of those discourses on liberty and government... of the last hundred and fifty years. - As conveying the most temperate notions of that liberty, whose blessings, when dispensed by the judicious hand of candour and moderation, are the peculiar boast and happiness of Britons, and the honour of human nature. - As tending to confirm every man in that subordination and regularity, that love, as well as respect, for the higher and governing powers, which is not only consistent with, but the only security for the enjoyment of real freedom. - And finally, as containing sentiments which do equal honour to the writer as a good Man, a sincere Christian and a True Patriot." "The Edinburgh Evening Courant", 6 November 1790. It might also be noted that the same newspaper published on 11 November an article attacking, not the principles and ideas expressed in the "Reflections", but Burke himself for inconsistency, and one in reply on 15 November 1790 by a "Rockingham Whig" defending him against this charge.

that the British Constitution was "the wonder and envy of the world."²⁰
 When the eminently respectable and politically conservative Edinburgh
 Revolution Club met at Bruce's Tavern, on 18 November 1789, to
 celebrate the anniversary of the Glorious Revolution, it expressed both
 that complacency and that hope in the toast - "May all the nations of
 the world soon enjoy as much liberty as Great Britain."²¹

20. For a description of the celebrations throughout Scotland to mark the centenary of the Glorious Revolution in November 1788 see "The Caledonian Mercury", 6, 8, 10 and 13 November 1788. For example, "The Caledonian Mercury" of 6 November 1788 records that the anniversary was observed in Edinburgh "as a day of public thanksgiving. No business was done at any of the public offices, or by the inhabitants of this city in general. The Churches were all remarkably crowded, more so perhaps than on any former holiday; and the ministers, from their different pulpits, after reading the Act of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland... endeavoured to impress on the minds of their hearers, the gratitude they owed to Almighty God for the blessings they derived from the Glorious Revolution, by which the nation was delivered from civil and religious oppression, proper bounds set to the Royal Prerogative, and the liberties and just rights of the people secured and confirmed; - and exhorted them, by every constitutional means, to preserve and transmit all these rights and privileges, which they now enjoyed under the illustrious House of Hanover, inviolate to the latest posterity." The General Assembly, referred to above, sent an Address, dated 30 May 1788, to George III, in which they stated that "We feel ourselves called upon to commemorate, that glorious event, the Revolution of 1688, which delivered us from Popery and Arbitrary Power, and fixed that Constitution of Government, which is the Wonder and Envy of the World, not more for civil and political liberty, than for Justice and Humanity... and which the experience of a century, now entitles us to hope, may be as lasting as it is excellent." Home Office Correspondence (Scotland), RH2/4/60, f342.

21. The Edinburgh Advertiser, 17-20 November 1789.

The address of the Dundee Whig Club, 4 June 1790²², is as much a paeon of praise to the British Constitution of 1688 as a laudatory address to the French National Assembly on the achievements of the Revolution. The Address stated that it originated from "a club instituted for the purposes of commemorating the recovery of our own liberty, and of preserving and improving our political constitution." It added that -

"since public liberty has been restored to us by the Revolution, our cities become daily more populous, our inhabitants more industrious, our mountains less barren, and our whole country more wealthy and happy. Nor have we any reason to believe virtue and good order to be on the decline. Our sovereign, the guardian of our constitution and the father of his people, is almost an object of our adoration; and our nobility and clergy form useful and illustrious members of a state, where all are subject to the laws."²³

22. It should be noted that the Dundee Address predated the decree of the French National Assembly abolishing titles of nobility. This decree, of 19 June 1790, alarmed many friends of French liberty, and gave warning that the French Revolution was going to be more radical than that most conservative of revolutions, the Glorious Revolution of 1688.

23. The Scots Magazine, L11, 458. The Dundee Address was published along with a translation of the National Assembly's reply, date 31 July 1790 and a short account of a meeting of the Dundee Whig Club on 27 August 1790, in the September edition of the magazine. It might be noted that at the 27 August meeting of the club a toast was drunk to "Great Britain and its happy constitution." IBID, 458.

It was ironic that the Dundee Whig Club's Address should be so badly misunderstood, both by alarmists like Burke who regarded the authors as Jacobins²⁴, and by the Dundee radicals of 1792 who saw them as likely colleagues and leaders.²⁵ The Dundee Whig Club were typical of those Scots who rushed forth in the early heady days of French liberty to express their approval of the Revolution: they hoped and believed that France would follow closely the wise example set by Britain a century earlier. The early Scottish friends of French liberty were essentially conservative men who had no desire to radically alter society or government.

What was it then that persuaded the Dundee radicals that in the Whig friends of French liberty they were likely to find allies? In part the answer lies in the enormous expectations raised among both Whig and radical alike by the French Revolution, the rhetoric of which masked important differences as to how, if at all, these expectations were to influence internal British politics.

24. E. Burke. "Reflections on the Revolution in France and on the proceedings in certain societies in London relative to that event." (Pelican edn, 1969) 366-367. "The Caledonian Mercury" and "The Edinburgh Evening Courant" published extracts from Burke's "Reflections" relating to the Queen of France, Lord George Gordon (who had been convicted of libelling her), and the French Assignats, the last of which contained Burke's withering comments on the Dundee Whig Club. It should not however be concluded from this that either newspaper necessarily agreed with Burke's views on these subjects. The first extract was probably chosen as an example of Burke's eloquence at its best, and the other two were probably picked because of their 'local interest' value. See, "The Caledonian Mercury", 8 November 1790, and "The Edinburgh Evening Courant", 6 November 1790.

25. Some time prior to 21 September 1792 the Dundee radicals "invited Geo. Dempster [who as chairman of the Dundee Whig Club had signed the Address to the French National Assembly] by letter to become their Chairman, but... he declined the honor adding among other reasons, that he was persuaded no constitution of gover^t can be better calculated to promote and ensure ye prosperity and happiness of the individual and nation than ours - and that it was their duty to rest satisfied". Robert Watt to [R. Dundas?], 21 September 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland), RH 2/4/64, f 318.

To many the fall of the Bastille and the overthrow of the ancien regime in France seemed to mark the dawn of a new era in the history of mankind. Charles James Fox (1749-1806), the leading Parliamentarian of the Whig party, spoke for many when he declared - "How much the greatest event it is that ever happened in the world! and how much the best!"²⁶ Bourbon France had seemed an impregnable bastion of despotism and its downfall was regarded as all the more astonishing in that it was totally unexpected. Dr. John Millar (1735-1801) Professor of Civil Law in the University of Glasgow and one of the most influential Whig writers of the period, commented that the French Revolution of 1789 was "beheld, by men of enlarged views, with equal surprise and satisfaction. The real friends of liberty were highly gratified by the sudden overthrow of a despotism which had, for ages, been apparently gathering solidity and firmness."²⁷ Moreover, the gratification and surprise of many were increased both by the relatively bloodless nature of the revolution and by the ability shown by the revolutionaries. That such an apparently powerful and secure system of tyrannical government should collapse without a civil war seemed almost incredible, that men of ability and character should appear, as it were from nowhere, to take over the ship of state and not only save it from shipwreck but steer it towards apparently calm waters seemed miraculous. The Whig Earl of Lauderdale (1759-1839) remarked that -

26. C.J. Fox to R. Fitzpatrick, 30 July 1789. "Memorials and Correspondence of Charles James Fox". ed Lord John Russell. 4 vols. (London, 1853-1857), II, (1853), p.361.

27. J. Millar. "Letters of Crito, on the causes, objects and consequences of the present war". (Edinburgh, 1796), 1.

"if the event itself was unexpected, the mode in which it was conducted was no less so. The energy and vigour displayed in the proceedings of the States General, the resolution and firmness which distinguished their measures... augmented the surprise... and there were none who did not see with astonishment - many who viewed with admiration - the great and animated exertions of a people contending for... the object of the greatest importance that could occupy the mind of men".²⁸

The triumph of the revolutionaries in France seemed, to the enthusiastic British friends of liberty, to herald a new golden age in which despotism would give way to liberty, poverty to prosperity, superstition to reason, ignorance to knowledge and enlightenment, and war to peace. Robert Haldane (1764-1842), a Perthshire landed gentleman and later a leading figure in the evangelical revival in Scotland, summed it up well when he wrote, that -

"Until the commencement of the French Revolution, I had never particularly turned my attention to political discussion, [but with its commencement] a scene of melioration and improvement in the affairs of mankind, seemed to open itself to my mind, which, I trusted, would speedily take place in the world; such as the universal abolition of slavery, of war, and of many other miseries that mankind were exposed to, and which appeared to me wholly to result from the false principles upon which the ancient governments had been constructed."²⁹

28. Earl of Lauderdale. "Letters to the Peers of Scotland by the Earl of Lauderdale" (London, 1794), 21-22.

29. R. Haldane. "Address to the Public, concerning Political Opinions, and Plans lately adopted to Promote Religion in Scotland". (Edinburgh, 1800), 3-4.

It was widely believed that with the fall of Bourbon despotism the military adventurism that was so closely associated with it would swiftly become a thing of the past. The argument was put succinctly by the Earl of Lauderdale, who wrote that -

"The extinction of a government, whose restless spirit of intrigue, whose continued love of warfare, whatever might be the character of the monarch on the throne, or the statesmen that surrounded him, promised to the nations of Europe the enjoyment of more peace and tranquillity than they had hitherto possessed."³⁰

Even the Prime Minister, William Pitt (1759-1806), a calculating and pragmatic man not noted for extravagance of speech or judgment, believed that the Revolution would prevent France from troubling the peace of Europe for many years. As late as February 1792, Pitt was telling the House of Commons that "unquestionably there never was a time in the history of this country, when, from the situation of Europe, we might more reasonably expect fifteen years of peace, than we may at the present moment."³¹ Pitt and his Government's optimism was not founded on any naive belief that the French revolutionaries would form an enlightened government dedicated to solving international disputes by peaceful negotiation, rather it was based upon the hard headed and, at the time, quite reasonable notion that the French would have their hands too full with internal problems to spare any time for aggressive war. This idea was to prove erroneous, but prior to the eventful summer of 1792 few seriously believed that Britain should go to war to combat the alleged international revolutionary designs of the French. Burke and the small coterie of alarmists who subscribed to his views on the need

30. Earl of Lauderdale, op cit, 22-23.

31. Parl. Hist., XXIX, 826.

to crush the French Revolution were isolated figures on the periphery of politics, regarded either as mischievous troublemakers or tiresome cranks.³²

Pitt's calculated approach was not shared by the more enthusiastic admirers of French liberty to whom the Revolution opened up the possibility of an alliance for liberty, peace and prosperity between Britain and France. The Dundee Whig Club, for example, were "confident, that the National Assembly of France, and the Parliament of Great Britain, will from henceforth be inseparably united in promoting the peace and prosperity of the two kingdoms, and in diffusing those blessings through the whole extent of the globe."³³ If a more or less permanent peace could be established between Britain and France, then, it was argued, the prospects for trade and industry would be almost limitless. Had not the deadly rivalry between the two countries throughout much of the century cost not only thousands of lives but also vast sums of money? Had not the national debt risen to unprecedented levels, the interest payments on which necessitated high taxes which grievously restricted economic growth? If the old rivalry could be replaced by friendship the national debt could be gradually paid off, taxes reduced, and economic activity stimulated. The author of an article, entitled 'Observations on the probable Consequences of the Revolution in France', first published in the radical 'Analytical Review' and subsequently republished in the more conservative 'Scots Magazine' was so convinced of the economic benefits

32. F. O'Gorman. "The Whig Party and the French Revolution" (London, 1967) 49, 72-76.

33. The Scots Magazine, L11, 457-458.

to Britain of the French Revolution that he suggested that "it would have been glorious in us to have assisted them [i.e. the revolutionaries], if the state of our finances had permitted us."³⁴ He concluded his article by declaring enthusiastically, that "We seem to be advancing to a great aera in the history of human affairs... The Genius of Commerce is gone forth amongst the nations of the earth; every where carrying Peace and Plenty and Freedom in her train."³⁵

If the French Revolution was expected to bring increased material benefits to mankind, its admirers also believed that it would bring equally important spiritual benefits. Late eighteenth century Scotland was a strongly and even militantly protestant country where Roman Catholicism was distrusted and feared as a spiritual despotism.³⁶ A French visitor noted in 1790 that "Here the Pope is antichrist; his religion the whore of Babylon, fraught with ten thousand abominations; and the celebration of the mass is a more formidable alarm, than the hostile invasion of a veteran army."³⁷ This abhorrence of Roman Catholicism was not based upon blind bigotry, but upon a coherent if somewhat selective interpretation of European history in which the Church of Rome was seen as the natural ally of civil and political tyranny. "Popery and slavery", it was argued, "are like sin and death, direct consequences of one another; and whenever we think proper to

34. IBID, L1, 475.

35. IBID, L1, 475.

36. The militancy of Scottish protestantism and its fear of Roman Catholicism were well illustrated in the campaign of 1779 to prevent the extension to Scotland of the provisions of the English Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1778. The best account of this campaign is to be found in E.C. Black. "The Association. British Extraparliamentary Political Organization 1769-1793" (Cambridge. Mass., 1963) 131-173.

37. Mons B-de, op cit, 71-72.

admit the first, anybody may promise us the last."³⁸ The equation of Roman Catholicism with civil and political 'slavery' was commonly accepted and both radicals³⁹ and conservatives subscribed to it. The Rev. Lawrence Moyes (1769-1831), who was to win both fame and a presentation for a loyalist pamphlet written in 1794, declared that -

"All over those countries where the religion of the church of Rome is established, where that charm is not yet dissolved, which has fettered millions of devoted votaries for many ages; the happiness of the Gospel is scarcely felt in the heart, and its influence scarcely visible in the conduct. For it is used, not as a means of salvation, but as the vehicle of power, the instrument of tyranny and oppression. Like many of those systems of ancient paganism, to which Statesmen and Legislators subjugated the people, in order to produce a conformity with their views of Government and administration: Like these, the forgeries and absurd traditions of the Catholic Church, were framed as a political engine, as a base pretext for assuming a supremacy over the minds of men, and establishing an unlimited power."⁴⁰

38. A. Bruce. "A Serious View of the Remarkable Providence of the Times: and a warning as to the Public Sins, Dangers, and Duty of British Protestants. First read to an Associate congregation in Scotland at the beginning of the French War; now published with an introduction relating to the present alarming state of Great Britain." (Glasgow, 1795), 19.

39. For example, William Skirving, one of the most prominent figures in the Scottish Democratic Movement, wrote to Alexander Fergusson of Craigdarroch "President of the French Revolution Society in Edin'", during the summer of 1791, stating that the Church and King mob who had recently attacked the houses of dissenters in Birmingham were the agents of Government policy and "the abettors of prelacy & popery." JC 26/280.

40. L. Moyes. "Gratitude to God: A Sermon, on Jeremiah VI.17. Preached in the Church of Larbert, upon a Day of Thanksgiving, appointed by the Synod of Perth and Stirling." (Falkirk, 1794), 19-20.

To the average eighteenth century Scotsman it was axiomatic that "Civil and Ecclesiastical liberty are but two great branches of the same expanded tree."⁴¹ Had not the progress of the protestant reformation assisted the progress of civil and political liberty in Scotland?⁴² Consequently, it was almost inevitable that the overthrow of the ancien regime in France should have been welcomed by Scots protestants as a victory for liberty over both despotism and priestcraft.⁴³ Moreover, theory was soon reinforced by practice. The

41. A. Bruce, "Reflections on the Freedom of Writing", III.

42. Archibald Bruce's view of the Scottish Reformation was not untypical. He contrasted the Reformation in England where it was achieved by act of state with that in Scotland where it was brought about by popular revolution. In Scotland, he argued, "the purity of the gospel, and the liberty of mens consciences, appeared to have been the primary object, while the redress of state-grievances, and the rectification of the civil policy of the land, came forward as collateral and concomitant objects... Accordingly, as might be expected, the change in the former kingdom [England], was not accompanied with any sensible accession or advantages to civil liberty, nor productive of a limitation but augmentation of regal prerogative: in the latter [Scotland], it produced a very remarkable struggle for civil rights, and popular liberty, which at the time did great honour to the principles and spirit of the Scotch Reformers, and eventually procured a system of national rights and legal privileges, civil and religious, which many of her neighbours have sought but have not yet attained." A. Bruce. "A Historico-Politico-Ecclesiastical Dissertation on the Supremacy of Civil Powers in Matters of Religion; particularly the Ecclesiastical Supremacy Annexed to the English Crown." (Edinburgh, 1802), 86-87.

43. It was not of course seen in that light by the small community of Roman Catholics in Scotland who considered the principles of the French Revolution abhorrent and its progress alarming. In August 1789 Bishop Geddes wrote to Rome, "I should be glad to know whether or not at Rome they dread any bad consequences to Religion in France, from the present Revolution. I am much afraid that in that respect it will do harm." Bishop Hay wrote to George Mathison, 4 April 1793, describing the war against France as "just and necessary." He argued that "to stop the progress of a set of furies, open and professed enemies to God and man [sic] and to prevent the spreading of their contagious and diabolical doctrines, which carry devastation and misery wherever they go, is surely a common cause of humanity." That such opinions were by no means limited to the hierarchy is made clear in a letter from Alexander Macdonald, priest in Keppoch, to Bishop Geddes, 15 August 1789, in which the French Revolution is described as caused by "the publications of the Infidels of the Age which have poisoned people's minds and have prepared them to throw off all subjection, both Civil and Religious." All quotations are taken from C. Johnson. "Developments in the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland 1789-1829." University of Edinburgh Ph.D. (1980), 147, 150 and 147. For further information see C. Johnson, op cit, Chapters 11 and 12.

French revolutionaries, it was noted with approval, destroyed not only the arbitrary power of the French monarchy but also the power and privileges of the Roman Catholic Church and, by granting liberty of worship and conscience, removed French protestantism from its former disabilities. Such developments, it was widely believed, pointed to the destruction of 'superstition' throughout the world and the triumph of 'true religion' and reason. This belief was held not only by clerics but by sophisticated and worldly laymen such as Professor John Millar, who wrote that -

"mysterious tenets, the invention of priestcraft in the dark ages, by which that religion was so unworthily debased, and rendered the instrument of undue influence and corruption, are likely to be exploded; and the unbounded authority and dominion which an ambitious and interested clergy have so long exercised over the rights of private judgment and of conscience, are likely to crumble down, and to be trodden under foot. The Roman Catholic superstition that gigantic monster which has drunk so much human blood, that dragon which has long guarded the den of ignorance, and held more than half of Europe in the chains of moral and political slavery, seems now to be fast approaching his last agonies."⁴⁴

Such optimism about the impending downfall of religious tyranny and 'superstition' could, among the less 'enlightened', take a millenarian turn. Archibald Bruce, for example, saw in the French Revolution the opening of a new and decisive phase in the struggle between Christ and Anti-Christ, a phase which would issue in the total

44. J. Millar, op cit, 49-50.

triumph of the former⁴⁵. Such was the strength and, in the political circumstances of the 1790s, the dangerous domestic implications of this strand of millenarianism that the Rev. John Erskine, the politically conservative leader of the Popular party in the Church of Scotland, felt called upon to try to counteract it.⁴⁶

If the French Revolution at first considerably strengthened the easy optimism that is so characteristic of not only the Whig friends

45. He wrote that "the true key for unfolding the nature and great design of the present movements and revolutions in Europe... is the scriptural account of the public continued contest between Christ and anti-christian powers, which shall terminate only in the decisive overthrow of the latter, and the total destruction of antichristianism." A Bruce. "A Serious View", 11.

46. In the second volume of his "Sketches and Hints of Church History and Theological Controversy", which was published in 1797, but written earlier, Erskine wrote - "Strange and paradoxical as the assertion may appear to some, who fancy they read in every victory of the French, a presage of Anti-Christ's speedy fall, more is to be apprehended to Protestantism from these victories, than from the fugitive royalists; though it is readily allowed, that nothing is more remote from the view of the conquerors than strengthening the Roman Catholic cause. This is not concluded from theory or speculation but from what has actually happened in a country [Holland], whose divines, by their piety, purity of doctrine, and theological literature, were among the chief bulwarks of the reformed churches. Future events are secret things which belong to the Lord. The manner, however, of the final destruction of popery, is a thing revealed. The ten kings who had given their power and strength unto the beast, shall hate the whore, and make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. Thus surely can neither mean that they are to befriend her in the day of her fall, nor that her fall was to be accomplished by their being guillotined or dethroned. The publisher, therefore sees no ground to conclude, that overturning the present monarchies, and religious establishments of Europe, is any where in scripture represented as a forerunner of the destruction of the Antichrist, or tends to the accomplishment of that event. He rather apprehends that Antichrist will recover his lost power, and will use it more cruelly than ever." Quoted in Sir H. Moncrieff-Wellwood. "Account of the Life and Writings of John Erskine, D.D." (Edinburgh, 1818) 330-331.

of liberty but of much of late eighteenth century society as a whole⁴⁷, its ultimate effect was to shatter the optimism of the more conservative sections of society. This sea-change in opinion did not occur overnight. Its progress was gradual and was closely linked with the history of the French Revolution and with how that revolution was interpreted in Britain.

As we have seen conservative opinion was at first divided but on the whole sympathetic to the French Revolution. This support was damaged as early as June 1790 when the French National Assembly abolished titles of nobility, but it was the summer of 1791 before conservative opinion became seriously alarmed about the direction taken by the revolution. The flight of Louis XVI, on 20 June 1791, to Varennes in an unsuccessful attempt to flee France and rally opposition to the revolution from outside his kingdom, and his subsequent ignominious return to Paris under military escort convinced many conservatives that despite previous hopes to the contrary the French Revolution was not a continental re-run of the Glorious Revolution, and that, whatever the constitutional niceties, France was becoming a de facto republic.⁴⁸

47. See P.A. Brown. "The French Revolution in English History" (London, 1918), 46. See also an essay published in the 'Bee' on 8 June 1791 on the Polish Revolution in which it was stated that "In future ages, the eighteenth century will make a most brilliant appearance, when compared at least with those that went before... Reason begins to dawn among mankind; and when the reign of systematic error shall be totally abolished, who can form an idea of the extent of those improvements we shall be able to attain?" "The Bee, or Literary Weekly Intelligencer", III, 190.

48. In the immediate aftermath of Louis' flight to Varennes the National Assembly suspended the king's powers and abolished his veto, gave orders to his ministers and to all purposes organised France as a republic. Anti-monarchical feeling in France reached new heights for no-one doubted that Louis' intention had been to organise a counter-revolutionary invasion to restore his authority, and all those who were identified with the anti-revolutionary cause were subject to suspicion and violence. Nobles and refractory priests were molested, and chateaux went up in flames. G. Lefebvre, op cit, 207-208.

It was against this background that meetings were held in Scotland, England, and Ireland on 14 July 1791 to celebrate the anniversary of the fall of the Bastille.

For the first time the authorities in Scotland showed an interest in and a clear disapproval of the friends of French liberty. Robert Dundas (1758-1819), the Lord Advocate, who had received an invitation to a celebratory dinner at the Crown and Anchor Tavern in London, was unimpressed by the organisers stated desire to avoid any discussion of domestic politics and indignantly forwarded the invitation to the Home Office with the comment - "I presume every man in Scotland whose name appears in a Scots Almanac is honoured with a similar invitation. You may mention it to Mr. D[undas] at his leisure."⁴⁹ In Edinburgh, where the Whig friends of liberty had planned a dinner at Fortune's Tavern

"Every effort was made by threats, promises and influence of all kinds to prevent the dinner taking place, and afterwards to lessen the effect of it. Those concerned in it were held out to be little better than traitors; and James Laing, who then took charge of the police of Edinburgh, stationed himself at the door of Fortune's Tavern ... noting down the names of all who entered."⁵⁰

49. R. Dundas to [?], 27 June 1791. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland), RH 2/4/62, f321. The enclosed invitation is to be found in IBID, f323.

50. J. Allen. "Inquiry into the Rise and Growth of the Royal Prerogative in England. A new edition, with the author's latest corrections, biographical notices, etc. To which is added an enquiry into the life and character of King Eadwig." (London, 1849), XIII.

Laing's list was sent by Lord Provost James Stirling to Henry Dundas, the Home Secretary⁵¹. In his covering letter Stirling stated that "if any judgment is to be formed from the present samples, they do not seem qualified to do much mischief in this or in any other country" and added, reassuringly, that "the meeting... incurred the universal censure of the community in which I believe, with... as few exceptions as in any other place whatever, the greatest harmony, peace and respect for the present Government prevails."⁵² There is no evidence that the authorities were alarmed by the celebrations, but equally their disapproval of the meetings and their interest in the participants is clear.

Stirling's comment on "the universal censure of the community" requires serious qualification. Undoubtedly the celebrants encountered some hostility from within their own communities, but it was hardly universal. The advertisement inviting attendance at the celebration dinner in Edinburgh intimated that it was to be held at the Merchants Hall, but in the event it was held at Fortune's Tavern. The change in venue may be more apparent than real,⁵³ but it is perhaps more likely that the members of the Merchants Company had second thoughts

51. J. Stirling to H. Dundas, 15 July 1791. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland), RH 2/4/62, ff346-347.

52. IBID, f344.

53. The advertisement stated that the celebration was to be held in the Merchant's Hall and that tickets were to be had at Fortune's Tavern. It is possible that, through carelessness, either the person who placed the advertisement, or the printer, transposed "Merchants Hall" and "Fortunes Tavern". For the advertisement in question see 'The Edinburgh Advertiser', 8-12 July 1791.

about the desirability of the meeting and cancelled the booking. In Glasgow too there is evidence that the celebrants faced some suspicion and were anxious to reassure the public that the meeting was not intended as a vehicle for criticising either the British Constitution or the policies of Government. The advertisement of 5 July announcing the intended dinner stated that

"It being the sole object of this meeting to celebrate, as a subject of exultation, the overthrow of despotism, and the establishment of civil and religious liberty in France, it is requested that no gentleman will, on that day, move, or introduce for discussion, any question whatever relative to the public affairs or the local concerns of this country.. No Cockade or other badge of distinction is intended to be worn."⁵⁴

In part this suspicion and hostility were owing to a belief that the friends of French liberty were Paineites. In an article, entitled 'Equal Rights', published in the 'Bee' on 10 August 1791, 'Poplicola' both ridiculed the Paineite idea of equal rights and attacked the celebrants of 14 July by describing an imaginary household in which the father voluntarily relinquished his authority over his family and granted equal rights to his wife, children, and servants "on the glorious 14th of July."⁵⁵ John Wilde (died 1840), the Professor of Civil Law in the University of Edinburgh and an enthusiastic admirer of Burke, believed that at least some of the celebrants of 14 July 1791 were devotees of Paine.⁵⁶ The problem, however, as Wilde

54. The Glasgow Mercury, 28 June - 5 July 1791.

55. The Bee, or Literary Weekly Intelligencer, IV, 174.

56. In writing of the friends of French liberty who met to celebrate Bastille Day on 14 July 1791 Wilde referred to "Your own Mr. Paine". J. Wilde. "An Address to the Lately Formed Society of the Friends of the People" (Edinburgh, 1793), XXIV

honestly admitted, lay in the fact that many of those who attended the dinner could never be accused credibly of holding subversive Paineite views. The Fortune's Tavern meeting was, he stated, "in general... a very respectable meeting; and I know certainly that it was attended by some persons with the very best views; and who would have honoured any meeting or place."⁵⁷

Wilde's assessment of the respectability of the meetings was apparently widely shared, his doubts about the constitutionality of some of the proceedings were not. The radically inclined 'Historical Register' observed that not one of the toasts given at the Fortune's Tavern meeting "could be supported to reflect, in the smallest degree on the present government of Britain. At Glasgow, the meeting was conducted in the same decent and orderly manner."⁵⁸ The much more conservative 'Edinburgh Advertiser' described the Fortune's Tavern meeting as attended by a "respectable company of gentlemen" and their toasts as "Constitutional."⁵⁹ Similarly, the 'Caledonian Mercury' remarked that as at Edinburgh "the same moderation and propriety was conspicuous" at the Glasgow meeting in the Tontine Tavern, "for while they applauded the French Revolution... they did not forget the blessings enjoyed by all ranks in these kingdoms, in consequence of our own glorious constitution."⁶⁰

57. IBID, XVI-XVII

58. The Historical Register, or Edinburgh Monthly Intelligencer, Volume 1, No. 1, July 1791, P.37. It should be noted that the only complete run of this periodical, formerly housed in the Signet Library in Edinburgh and consulted by H.W. Meikle, was sold and its present whereabouts are unknown.

59. The Edinburgh Advertiser, 12-15 July 1791.

60. The Caledonian Mercury, 16 July 1791.

It is easy to see how newspapers with vastly different political viewpoints came to the same conclusions about the meetings. The men who attended these meetings were certainly what the eighteenth century understood by the term 'respectable'. The Fortune's Tavern meeting was chaired by Alexander Fergusson of Craigdarroch, a Dumfriesshire country gentleman, advocate and prominent county reformer, and was attended by a total of 73 people, of whom 13 were students, 10 advocates, 5 writers to the signet, 3 writers, 3 merchants, 2 haberdashers, and 2 farmers. There were also present a legal apprentice, a civil servant, a grocer, an engraver, and a bookseller. The other 40 "were unknown" to James Laing, Stirling's informant.⁶¹ More revealing than this incomplete occupational analysis is the fact that tickets for the dinner cost 7/6d.,⁶² a sum vastly in excess of what an ordinary working man could afford. At least one other meeting was held in Edinburgh, (at the "House of Stewart", Royal Exchange), but although it was described as having been attended by "violent reformers", it too was an exclusive affair, for the dinner tickets cost 2/6d.,⁶³ a sum comparable to a day's income for a skilled workman and consequently above his means. Tickets for the dinner at the Tontine Tavern in Glasgow also cost 2/6d.,⁶⁴ and, although little is known about the individuals who attended, it seems reasonable to assume that it was socially exclusive. Certainly the social status of those known to have

61. Inclosed with J. Stirling to H. Dundas, 15 July 1791, loc cit.

62. The Edinburgh Advertiser, 8-12 July 1791.

63. Inclosure with J. Stirling to H. Dundas, 15 July 1791, loc cit.

64. The Glasgow Mercury, 28 June - 5 July 1791.

attended gives no grounds for challenging that assumption. The meeting was chaired by Lt. Col. William Dalrymple of Cleland and Fordell (1748-1794), an extensive landowner holding estates in Lanarkshire and Midlothian, the proprietor of Cleland iron works and of adjacent coal mines, and a member of the important Stair family.⁶⁵ The croupier (i.e. vice-chairman) was Dr. John Millar, Professor of Civil Law in the University of Glasgow and the owner of the small Lanarkshire estate of Millheugh, while the advertisement announcing the meeting named Dr. Thomas Reid (1710-1796), Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Glasgow, and "Mr. Gillespie" of Anderston, who was probably one William Gillespie, a linen printer and burgess and guild brother of Glasgow, as two of their stewards.⁶⁶

The proceedings of the various meetings offer a revealing insight into the political views of the men who attended them. Their confidence in the French Revolution was still largely unshaken,⁶⁷

65. Lt. Col. William Dalrymple was the son of Sir William Dalrymple (1704-1771), third Baronet of Cousland and Kelloch, and the brother of Sir John Dalrymple (1726-1810), who inherited the baronetcy, became a Baron of Exchequer and adhered to the Whig party. Sir John Dalrymple's son, also called John (1771-1853), acceded to the Earldom of Stair in 1840 as the eighth earl. Lt. Col. William Dalrymple, who had a distinguished war record in the American War of Independence, was the proprietor of the estates of Cleland and Fordell. "The Scots Peerage, founded on Wood's edition of Sir Robert Douglas' Peerage of Scotland, containing an historical and genealogical account of the nobility of that Kingdom." ed. Sir J. Balfour Paul, 9 vols. (Edinburgh, 1904-1914), VIII (1911), pp. 120-122, 158-159. He was described as being of "good estate". C. Adam, *op cit*, 119. For a description of Cleland Iron Works (also known as the Omoa Iron Works) and associated mine workings see USA, XV, 59-61.

66. The Glasgow Mercury, 28 June - 5 July, and 12-19 July 1791.

67. The Glasgow meeting gave as a toast "May the glorious French Revolution be as productive of happiness to the French nation as it now promises to be", while at the Fortune's Tavern meeting in Edinburgh toasts were drunk to - "May the French Constitution, which has reason and justice for its basis, be as permanent as the principles upon which it is founded", and "May the French Revolution be the aera of universal liberty to mankind". 'The Edinburgh Courant', 16 July 1791, and 'The Caledonian Mercury', 16 July 1791.

although it is probably significant that the Dundee Revolution Club gave as one of its toasts "Stability to the New Constitution of France".⁶⁸ This toast is perhaps indicative of a fear that France might, in the aftermath of the Varennes episode, move towards republicanism. The confidence and optimism of the celebrants had recently been reinforced by events in Poland where the aristocracy 'without the smallest compulsion or even solicitation on the part of the people, have voluntarily abandoned some of their highest prerogatives of which they have on all former occasions shown themselves most rigidly tenacious.'⁶⁹ That this revolution should have taken place in a country "where a system of rigid aristocratic despotism has prevailed for many ages" rendered the Polish revolution "among all the triumphs of reason over prejudice that have occurred in the present age.. the most surprising and wonderful."⁷⁰ Well might the friends of liberty exclaim "Reason begins to dawn among mankind; and when the reign of systematic error shall be totally abolished who can form an idea of the extent of those improvements we shall be able to attain."⁷¹

Consequently when the friends of liberty met to celebrate the anniversary of the fall of the Bastille, they met also to applaud the Polish revolution and the spread of 'enlightened' political ideas throughout the world. The Dundee Revolution Club drank to the "King and Revolution of Poland",⁷² while in Glasgow the toast was "Prosperity to the new government of Poland, planned by a Patriot King."⁷³

68. The Edinburgh Evening Courant, 21 July 1791.

69. The Bee, or Literary Weekly Intelligencer, III, 191.

70. IBID, 190-191.

71. IBID, 190.

72. The Edinburgh Evening Courant, 21 July 1791.

73. IBID, 16 July 1791.

The apparently rapid and accelerating progress in the application of 'rational principles' to government throughout the world filled the celebrants with optimism that liberty, peace, and religious toleration would soon be widely diffused among the nations of the earth. There was expectation as well as hope in the toast of the Glasgow meeting that "May the dawn of liberty on the continent soon be followed by its meridian splendour,"⁷⁴ in that of the Fortune's Tavern diners that "May the French Revolution be the aera of universal liberty to mankind,"⁷⁵ and in that of the Dundee Revolution Club wishing "Emancipation to Spain and the other enslaved nations of Europe."⁷⁶ The same expectation and hope inspired the Glasgow toasts, "May an attachment to the common cause of liberty prove, among all the free nations, the bond of peace and amity", and "May bigotry, superstition, and all manner of religious tyranny, soon come to an end."⁷⁷

The men who met to celebrate the French and Polish revolutions did not desire a revolution in Britain. They believed that Britain had already secured its own liberty at the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Thus, at the Tontine Tavern meeting in Glasgow, toasts were drunk to the King, the Royal Family, and the Constitution⁷⁸, while at Dundee the Revolution Club toasted the King, the Royal Family, and "The Memory of William the Third and the Revolution of 1688."⁷⁹ However while the

74. IBID, 16 July 1791.

75. The Caledonian Mercury, 16 July 1791.

76. The Edinburgh Evening Courant, 21 July 1791.

77. IBID, 16 July and 18 July 1791.

78. IBID, 16 July 1791. One of the Glasgow toasts was "May the free constitution of Great Britain and Ireland flourish and prosper to the latest posterity."

79. IBID, 21 July 1791.

Bastille Day diners may not have been revolutionaries, they were reformers. The Glasgow celebrants, despite their professed intention of avoiding the discussion of domestic politics, stated their clear and unequivocal support for the doctrine of natural rights and denounced Burke's theory of prescription.⁸⁰ They also gave a broad hint that Thomas Paine's 'Rights of Man', part one of which had been published in February 1791, had won their approval, when they gave as a toast "The Liberty of the Press, and prosperity to those distinguished characters who have used it so successfully in support of the rights of man."⁸¹ The only explicit demand for reform, however, came in a toast that "trade and manufactures be unrestrained by the fetters of monopoly":⁸² a sentiment aimed at the Corn Bill of 1791 and suggestive of the presence of members of the Glasgow business community at the dinner. More explicit calls for reform came from the Dundee meeting where toasts were drunk to "The Rights of Man, and an equal Representation of the People", "A speedy Abolition of the Slave Trade", and "The Abolition of all Religious Tests as a Qualification for Civil Offices".⁸³ The Fortune's Tavern diners in Edinburgh hinted strongly at their opposition to the Test Act, and expressed their approval of Paine both in a toast to "The Rights of Man" and in another to "The most celebrated English writers on the French government, Mackintosh,

80. They gave as toasts, "May every civil government be founded on the natural rights of man" and "May neither precedent nor antiquity be a sanction to errors pernicious to mankind". IBID, 16 July 1791.

81. IBID, 18 July 1791.

82. IBID, 18 July 1791.

83. IBID, 21 July 1791.

Paine and Priestley."⁸⁴ It is significant however that Paine was applauded as a writer "on the French Government" and not as a critic of the British Constitution. The men who assembled together to celebrate the French Revolution were not republicans and, while many if not all probably favoured a measure of parliamentary reform, it is unlikely that any were democrats.

Of those known to have attended the meetings in Glasgow and Edinburgh⁸⁵, few were to play any significant role in the Scottish radical reform movement of the 1790s. Of the 33 named by James Laing as attending the Fortune's Tavern dinner in Edinburgh, only 2 can be definitely identified as future members of the Friends of the People; viz. "Mr. Fowler, student of medicine",⁸⁶ who acted as croupier to

84. The Caledonian Mercury, 16 July 1791.

85. The names of those who attended the Dundee meeting are not known.

86. "Richardus Fowler, Anglus" graduated in medicine from the University of Edinburgh in 1795. "List of the Graduates in Medicine in the University of Edinburgh, from MDCCV to MDCCCLXVI." (Edinburgh, 1867), 24. Delegated by the Portsburgh Society to the 1st Convention, he allied himself with the moderates in opposing the reading of the United Irish Address and in supporting a motion for an address to the burgh reformers asking them to co-operate with the Friends of the People. Meikle, op cit, 240, 246, 264. These and all other references to the proceedings of the 1st Convention are taken from Meikle, Appendix A, 239-273. Meikle's account has been checked against the spy's reports in the Home Office Papers and the official minutes published in the Parliamentary History, XXXI, 871-879, and has been found to be accurate. It is used here because it is a more accessible source for the reader.

Fowler continued to adhere to the moderate, Foxite, wing of the movement in the early months of 1793. He supported the Foxite lawyer John Morthland at a delegate meeting of the Edinburgh Friends of the People, on 2 January 1793, in opposing T.F. Palmer's motion for a public declaration against war with France, on the grounds that the movement should only concern itself with parliamentary reform, and in urging the prudence "in the present stage of the business of ceasing their activity till the issue of the petitions [to Parliament for reform] should be known". At another meeting of this committee, on 6 March 1793, he returned to the same subjects, urging the movement to "keep close" to its original objects of "freedom of Election and shorter duration of Parliaments.. and these alone", and stating "That when their Petition was presented to Parliament their business was done.. that if it were rejected, as he supposed it would be, they ought to take a farewell of their Countrymen". J.B. to [R. Dundas?] 3 January, and 6 March 1793. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH2/4/68, ff17-22, and RH2/4/70, ff37-43. Fowler's arguments were rejected and he does not seem to have played an active part in the movement thereafter. He was not delegated to any of the subsequent conventions.

Fergusson of Craigdarroch, and "John Millar, Glasgow" (1760-1796), the eldest son of Professor Millar of Glasgow and an advocate.⁸⁷ In addition, it is possible, but by no means certain, that "Robert Cleghorn", a farmer at Stenhouse Milns near Edinburgh, may be identical with one "Cleghorn" delegated by the Original Association of Edinburgh to the 1st Convention of the Friends of the People,⁸⁸ and that "Campbell apprentice to James Horn, W.S." may be James Campbell who served as secretary to the Fortune's Tavern meeting of 26 July 1792, (which originated the Edinburgh Association of the Friends of the People), and was delegated to the 1st Convention by the Original Association of

87. "A young lawyer of very great ability, and indefatigable industry", Millar had been admitted to the Faculty of Advocates in 1783. C. Adam, op cit, 226, and "The Faculty of Advocates in Scotland 1532-1943", ed Sir F.J. Grant (Edinburgh, 1944), 149. An active burgh reformer, Millar presented copies of the burgh reformers' petition to a meeting of the delegate committee of the Edinburgh Friends of the People on 23 January 1793, arguing that the Association should sign them. His proposal was supported by those who argued that "while Parliament would not grant a general reform" it would consider burgh reform, but was successfully opposed by the radicals who argued that the attainment of a "partial" reform would prevent full parliamentary reform. J.B. to [R. Dundas?] 24 January 1793. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland), RH 2/4/69, ff 235-236. Millar, who had been delegated by the Cowgate Society to the 1st Convention, had evidently decided by January 1793 that Parliamentary reform was unattainable in the prevailing circumstances and rebuffed in his attempt to get the radicals to support burgh reform, he took his leave of the movement. Although he was delegated by the Hamilton Society to the 2nd Convention in April 1793 he did not attend either that or any subsequent convention. In 1795, "disgusted with the state of public affairs in Scotland.. he determined to seek peace and freedom in the United States of America". He emigrated to Pennsylvania where he died in 1795. E. Fletcher, op cit, 71 and J. Millar "The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks: or, an Inquiry into the Circumstances which give rise to Influence and Authority, in the Different Members of Society. To which is prefixed, an Account of the Life and Writings of the Author, by John Craig, Esq." (Edinburgh, 1806), CXXV-CXXVI.

88. Meikle, op cit, 241. Robert Cleghorn was "a most respectable farmer". He was the step-father of John Allen, another of the Bastille Day celebrants at Fortune's Tavern, who was at that time a medical student at the University of Edinburgh. J. Allen, op cit, XII.

Edinburgh⁸⁹. Of those few named as attending the Tontine Tavern dinner in Glasgow both Lt. Col. William Dalrymple⁹⁰, the chairman, and Professor John Millar, the vice chairman, were to take part in the radical reform

89. The history of the Society of Writers to the Signet records that James Campbell was apprenticed to John Campbell and that he was admitted to the Society on 14 June 1791, one month before the Bastille Day dinner. However, there is no Campbell recorded as having been apprenticed to James Horn. It could be that Laing was mistaken as to the name of the lawyer training James Campbell and unaware that he had completed his apprenticeship. "A History of The Society of Writers to Her Majesty's Signet, with a list of the members of the society from 1594 to 1890 and an abstract of the minutes". (Edinburgh, 1890), 32. James Campbell was the secretary of the Fortune Tavern's meeting on 26 July 1792 which gave birth to the Edinburgh Society of the Friends of the People. "Minute Book of the Edinburgh Friends of the People", JC 26/280. He served as a delegate from the Original Association of Edinburgh to the 1st Convention. Meikle, op cit, 241. Campbell does not seem to have taken an active part in the movement after the 1st Convention and did not attend any of the subsequent conventions.

90. Dalrymple was an enthusiastic county reformer and attended the delegate convention of county reformers in Edinburgh, 2 July 1792. C. Wyvill. "Political Papers, chiefly respecting the attempt of the County of York, and other considerable districts, commenced in 1779, and continued during several subsequent years, to effect a Reformation of the Parliament of Great Britain". 6 Volumes (York, 1794-1806), III, 37. He subsequently became a leading member of the Scottish Friends of the People, chairing the inaugural meeting of the Glasgow Association of the Friends of the Constitution and of the People, on 3 October 1792. "The Caledonian Mercury", 13 October 1792. Dalrymple's services as a leader and organiser, particularly in the west of Scotland were frequently the subject of a vote of thanks from radical societies. For example, the Gallowgate Society in Glasgow voted their thanks to Dalrymple on 13 November 1792. "The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer", 23 November 1792. Dalrymple was delegated by both the Glasgow Association and the Original Association of Edinburgh to the 1st Convention. Meikle, op cit, 239 and 241. His behaviour at the Convention was marked by a nervous apprehension of the possible consequences of his attendance and by a clearly connected desire for the movement to present an impeccably constitutionalist image to the public and government. When on the first day of the Convention, Muir and Lord Daer proposed that he be chosen chairman he "declined the honour, insisting that as a military man the Ministry might accuse him of an attempt to raise a rebellion in the country", and, when Muir proposed that the Convention receive and answer the Address of the Dublin Society of United Irishmen, Dalrymple protested that "it contained treason, or at least misprision of treason". Meikle, op cit, 242 and 245. On 15 December, two days after the Convention had adjourned, Lord Advocate Dundas reported with pardonable exaggeration that "Dalrymple [is] frightened out of his wits". R. to H. Dundas, 15 December 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH 2/4/66, f340. Dalrymple does not seem to have taken an active part in the subsequent history of the radical reform movement.

movement. Millar indeed was a member of both the London Association of the Friends of the People and of its namesake in Glasgow.⁹¹ All these men shared, besides an enthusiasm for the French Revolution and the ability to pay for an expensive meal, a commitment to a radical reform of the system of parliamentary representation. This commitment, however, almost certainly fell short of that of most of their future colleagues to full manhood suffrage. Moreover, it is probably no coincidence that none of them were to play any significant part in the radical movement after the 1st Convention in December 1792. When, in 1793, the Scots radicals unequivocally nailed their political colours to the mast of universal manhood suffrage, the Whig friends of liberty abandoned ship.

Nevertheless, although the democratic credentials of the Whig friends of liberty are, to say the least, somewhat suspect, it would be foolish to ignore or dismiss their contribution to the making of the Scottish Democratic Movement. The inescapable fact is that it was men such as Dalrymple of Fordell who were closely and crucially involved in creating and organising a mass movement for parliamentary reform. If they failed in their attempt to create a unity from a heterogeneous mixture of burgh reformer, Foxite Whig, and radical artisan, their achievement lay in creating a movement strong enough to alarm conservative opinion and Government itself into mounting a ferocious counter-offensive, and in giving to the movement in its early days a distinctly circumspect and moderate tone which sought to avert and then to answer that counter-offensive. The discussion of their role in

91. Howell, State Trials, XXIV, 1025. [?] Moncrieff to A. Maconochie, 12 October 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland), RH 2/4/64, ff369-370.

the creation of an organised radical reform movement belongs more popularly elsewhere, but it is important, at this point, to outline their political ideology.

The friends of liberty were constitutional Whigs! The constitution of 1688, to which they paid homage, sought, by means of a system of checks and balances, to maintain a happy equilibrium between King, Lords, and Commons, and thus to preserve both political stability and individual liberty. Constitutional theory was perhaps best and certainly most influentially⁹² explained by William

92. Blackstone's "Commentaries" was the constitutional bible of radicals and conservatives alike. Lord Cockburn recalled the advice given to him as a young man, in the 1790s, by a respected old Tory, Adam Rolland of Gask: "my young friend, philosophy is the vice of the age. Take my advice and read nothing whatever but Scotch and Civil Law, except the first volume of Blackstone, the introduction to Robertson's Charles the Fifth, Hume's History of the Stewarts, and De Lolme". H. Cockburn, *op cit*, 362-363. When the Gallowgate Society of the Friends of the Constitution and of the People sought to justify universal manhood suffrage to the public, they did so by quoting from Blackstone. "The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer", 23 November 1792. Moreover, when in a pamphlet dated 26 November 1792 the Glasgow radicals sought to convince their fellow citizens that standing armies represented a threat to the nation's liberties they appealed to Blackstone as "the highest authority" on constitutional matters. G. Hamilton to H. Dundas, 27 November 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland), RH 2/4/65, ff 121-122.

Blackstone (1723-1780)⁹³, the Oxford legalist, but there were many who complained that theory was not matched by practice. Throughout the eighteenth century opposition politicians had denounced the allegedly growing power and influence of the king, warned that the vaunted balance of the constitution was endangered, and proposed various reforms which would remedy the situation. Traditionally they had sought to restore the balance of the constitution by means of shorter parliaments, legislation to prevent the corruption of the electorate, Place Bills to prevent men holding offices of the Crown from sitting in the House of Commons, Pension Bills to restrict the amount of patronage available to the King and his Ministers, restrictions on the size of the standing army, and reform of the representative system.⁹⁴ All the

93. Blackstone wrote - "And herein indeed consists the true excellence of the English government, that all the parts of it form a mutual check upon each other. In the legislative, the people are a check upon the nobility, and the nobility a check upon the people; by the mutual privilege of rejecting what the other has resolved: while the king is a check upon both, which preserves the executive power from encroachments. And this very executive power is again checked and kept within due bounds by the Two houses, through the privilege they have of enquiring into, impeaching, and punishing the conduct (not indeed of the king, which would destroy his constitutional independence; but which is more beneficial to the public) of his evil and pernicious counsellors. Thus every branch of our civil polity supports and is supported, regulates and is regulated, by the rest; for the two houses naturally drawing in two directions of opposite interest, and the prerogative in another still different from them both, they mutually keep each other from exceeding their proper limits; while the whole is prevented from separation, and artificially connected together by the mixed nature of the crown, which is part of the legislative, and the sole executive magistrate. Like three different powers in mechanics, they jointly impel the machine of government in a direction different from what either, acting by themselves, would have done; but at the same time in a direction partaking of each, and formed out of all; a direction which constitutes the true line of the liberty and happiness of the community". W. Blackstone. "Commentaries on the Laws of England," I, (Oxford, 1765)150-151.

94. This account is based upon H.T. Dickinson. "Liberty and Property. Political Ideology in Eighteenth Century Britain" (London, 1977), H.J. Laski "Political Thought in England from Locke to Bentham" (London, 1920), J. Brewer "Party Ideology and popular politics at the accession of George III" (Cambridge University Press, 1976), and H.T. Dickinson "The Eighteenth Century Debate on the Glorious Revolution" in "History. The Journal of the Historical Association", vol 61, No. 201 (1976).

proposed reforms of the representative system had as their object however not the extension of political power to new social groups and the creation of a more just society, but rather the creation of a more virtuous electorate and House of Commons immune to the corrupting influence of the Crown. By the second half of the eighteenth century the old Country Party complaints about the encroachments of executive power and the corruption of the political system had lost their novelty but not their force, and had become the common coin of political debate. From the 1760s onwards, however, there was a gradual but profoundly important shift away from the old Country Party emphasis on limiting the power of the executive to a newer emphasis on strengthening the democratic element in the legislative. The objective, that of restoring the balance of the constitution, was the same, but the means to be employed in attaining it were somewhat different.⁹⁵

The Whig party under the leadership of first the Marquis of Rockingham (1730-1782) and then Fox was never united on the question of parliamentary reform. Most of the party grandees were hostile to such innovations, and party unity was based therefore not upon any commonly agreed scheme of parliamentary reform but upon distrust of the Crown, agreement to pursue policies which would check and diminish that power, and, after the fall of the Fox-North coalition in 1784, hatred of William Pitt and his adherents. The desirability of parliamentary reform and the type of reform to be sought were issues on which the party agreed to differ⁹⁶. Outside the party however there was an

95. J. Brewer, *op cit*, 19-20. And also H.T. Dickinson, "The Eighteenth Century Debate", 40.

96. P.J. Brunsdon. "The Association of the Friends of the People 1792-1796". Manchester University M.A. (1961), 5. The Earl of Lauderdale bitterly contrasted the Whig party in the years prior to 1792, when "though individuals might differ about particular measures [they] remained united, maintained their principle, and pursued their system", with the party which greeted the formation of the Association of the Friends of the People in April 1792 with marked hostility. Earl of Lauderdale, *op cit*, 170, 178-179.

increasingly strong, if still essentially unrepresentative,⁹⁷ body of opinion which believed that executive influence had risen to such a height as to seriously weaken the constitution and that parliamentary reform was necessary to restore its health and balance. Such was the ideological justification behind the campaigns of the Rev. Christopher Wyvill's (1740-1822) Association movement in England⁹⁸ and the county reform movement in Scotland⁹⁹ during the 1780s. Such also was an important constituent element in the radical ideology of the 1790s.

Traditionally the Whigs had looked to "a union of talents and rank", to the great landed families and those men of ability who were patronised by and adhered to them, to limit the growing influence of the Crown. However, as Professor John Millar, the croupier of the Tontine Tavern dinner in Glasgow and one of the most influential 'advanced' Whigs of the period, argued, "the general luxury of the times has introduced such a degree of extravagance, that the expenses, even of the most opulent families, are apt to exceed their incomes, and to render ministerial dependence their only resource against what to them is really indigence"¹⁰⁰. Moreover, these "leading families" were as much corrupting as corrupted. The imperfect nature of the county franchise facilitated

97. Wyvill's association movement had little support in England, and the metropolitan radicals, whose views were expressed in the works of Hulme, Jebb and Burgh, had even less. I.R. Christie. "Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform. The parliamentary reform movement in British politics 1760-1785". (London, 1962), 168-169, 224. A study of the Scottish county reform movement, which is much needed, would hopefully establish how much support that movement had.

98. I. Christie, op cit, 72-73.

99. See Chapter 1, pp.52-55.

100. J. Millar, "The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks", CIII.

the growth of "aristocratical influence" to such a height that Robert Fergusson of Craigdarroch, the son of the chairman of the Fortune's Tavern dinner in Edinburgh and a leading county reformer in his own right, claimed that "the representation of the commons of Scotland has been fixed in the hands of the aristocracy."¹⁰¹ Consequently, the friends of liberty could no longer trust to the "co-operation of leading families" and had to look elsewhere. The answer to their problems, some of the more advanced Whigs began to think, lay in extending the franchise. The progress of commerce and industry during the century, men like Millar argued, had "produced a general spirit of independence and a very wide diffusion of knowledge" among the middling ranks of men who were better informed politically and economically than the highest orders of the community were before the Revolution of 1688.¹⁰² Consequently, they argued,

"The great body of the nation, those who may justly be styled the people, attentive to the conduct of public men, and capable of estimating public measures, might now be entrusted with the power of choosing representatives, without much risk of their choice being very inconsiderate."¹⁰³

The recruitment of such a body of knowledgeable, economically independent, and virtuous men into the political system was, Millar and his friends argued, the only way of resisting the growth of influence and thus of preserving liberty: "if any barrier can be effectual against the tide of corruption, it must be found in a body so large as to be independent of Court favour, and in some degree exempt from secret intrigue."¹⁰⁴ However, while it is clear that Millar came increasingly

101. R. Fergusson, *op cit*, 5.

102 J. Millar, *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*, CIV.

103. *IBID*, CIV.

104. *IBID*, CV.

to believe in the need for a radical extension of the franchise, it is equally clear that he, like his associates in the county and burgh reform movements, was firmly opposed to universal manhood suffrage. The lower orders were neither so "independent in their circumstances or so enlightened as to prefer the public good to their immediate pecuniary interest" and consequently universal suffrage would "spread wider the evils of corruption" rather than reduce them.¹⁰⁵

Millar's political opinions were probably representative of many of those who joined him in celebrating Bastille Day in 1791. A significant number of those recorded as attending the Fortune's Tavern dinner can be identified either as Foxite Whigs or as burgh and county reformers.¹⁰⁶ His views were certainly representative of the small

105. IBID, CVI.

106. Alexander Fergusson, the chairman, was "Attached to the Dean of Faculty and Opposition". C. Adam, op cit, 101. James Gibson (1765-1850), later known as Gibson-Craig, who presided over a smaller meeting of celebrants at Fortune's Tavern, was a "bold" adherent of the Foxite Whig cause. "The Dictionary of National Biography", IV, 1367. John Allen (1771-1843), a medical student at the University of Edinburgh, "was zealous in promoting the cause of political reform in Scotland" and later achieved fame as a member of the Holland House set and as a Whig historian of the Royal Prerogative. IBID, I, 309-310. Archibald Fletcher (1745-1828), Adam Gillies (1766-1842), Thomas Wilson (1758-1824), John Clerk of Eldin (1757-1832), and John Millar, the son of Professor Millar, were all Whigs and members of the Standing Committee of the burgh reformers. A. Fletcher, op cit, 22-23. Malcolm Laing (1762-1818), the advocate and historian, was to become an original member of the London Association of the Friends of the People. Howell, State Trials, XXIV, 1025. John Hagart, (died 1816), attended Fox's birthday dinner in 1796. National Library of Scotland (henceforth NLS) Melville Papers, MSS 7, f100. Sir James Gibson-Craig later remarked that those who attended the Bastille Day dinner "formed the nucleus on which the liberal party of Scotland was founded." J. Allen, op cit, XIV.

number of Bastille Day diners who later joined the Scottish Association of the Friends of the People and of the larger number of Foxites who are not known to have attended the dinners but who later joined the radical reform movement. In this later case the personal links with Professor Millar are particularly striking. The Earl of Lauderdale, who was one of the guiding lights behind the formation of the London Association of the Friends of the People, was Millar's "favourite pupil."¹⁰⁷ Millar's biographer, John Craig, recalled that Millar and Lauderdale met frequently during the Professor's summer vacations, and that, during his visit to London in the summer of 1792 Millar spent much of his time in Lauderdale's company.¹⁰⁸ John Morthland of Rindmuir (died 1807), a Foxite Whig¹⁰⁹ and a "lawyer of real abilities"¹¹⁰, who became closely involved in the Scottish radical reform movement during 1792 and served as a delegate to the 1st Convention¹¹¹, matriculated at the University of Glasgow in 1764¹¹² and must have been taught law by Millar, but it was Thomas Muir the enigmatic 'enfant terrible' of the Scottish Democratic Movement who was perhaps Millar's most famous student. Muir's nationalist and republican sympathies, which were to strengthen or at least be more

107. J. Millar, *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*, XC.

108. *IBID*, XCII..

109. Morthland attended Fox's birthday dinner in Edinburgh in 1796. NLS, Melville Papers, MSS 7, f100.

110. C. Adam, *op cit*, 215.

111. He was delegated by the Original Association of Edinburgh. Meikle, *op cit*, 243.

112. "The Matriculation Albums of the University of Glasgow from 1728 to 1858". (Glasgow, 1913), 74.

openly expressed as times and circumstances changed, were not shared by Millar, but there can be little doubt that Muir was considerably influenced by Millar's political ideas.¹¹³ In a contemporary biography of Muir, written by a political associate and personal friend - who may have been Robert Forsyth (1766-1846),¹¹⁴ an associate of Muir's from student days in Glasgow and a delegate to the 1st Convention - the ideological origins of the radical reform movement, as seen by the author and his subject, are explained. The Revolution of 1688, the biographer stated, reserved "a vast mass of influence.. to the Crown, which the funding system, soon afterwards adopted has increased, and is still increasing in a duplicate proportion." Thus, although

113. This influence has been noted by K.J. Logue, who observed that "the most important influence on Muir's thought was probably Professor John Millar", and by M. Donnelly who wrote that "the impact of Millar's fertile mind upon Muir's subsequent political and social sympathies was strong and enduring". K.J. Logue. "Thomas Muir" in "History is My Witness" (ed G. Menzies), (BBC, 1976), 19. M. Donnelly's biography of Muir is to be found in the "Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals", (eds J.O. Baylen and N.J. Gossman), I, (Harvester Press, Sussex, 1979), 330. These two essays are the most scholarly modern biographies of Muir in print, but C. Bewley's "Muir of Huntershill" (Oxford University Press, 1981), while it is both unscholarly and confusing, is worthy of critical consultation.

114. The case for Robert Forsyth being the author of this biography, while not conclusive, is certainly suggestive. The author of the biography stated that he was a younger fellow student of Muir and that Muir assisted him with his studies. "The Glasgow Magazine" December 1795, 248. Muir was born in 1765 and went up to the University of Glasgow in 1777, while Forsyth was born in 1766 and matriculated in 1780. "The Matriculation Albums of the University of Glasgow from 1728 to 1858", 119 and 129. Muir's biographer was clearly not only intimately acquainted with Muir's history but sympathetic to his politics and to him personally. Both Muir and Forsyth were of relatively humble origin, Forsyth being the son of a tailor and Muir the son of a hop merchant who prospered and bought a small estate in later life, both originally intended to become ministers and ended up qualifying as lawyers, both practised law in Edinburgh, and both became not only members of the Friends of the People but delegates to the 1st Convention. IBID, 119 and 129. "The Glasgow Magazine", July 1795, 41 and 44. "The Dictionary of National Biography", IV, 473, and XII, 1165-1166. Meikle, op cit, 239 and 241.

"the forms and solemn debates in Parliament, give every measure of government the tone of public opinion", the reality was that a danger existed that a "majority of parliament should become dependent on the king". Such a loss of parliamentary independence would destroy the balance of the constitution and threaten "convulsion or bankruptcy".¹¹⁵ As Muir put it himself, radical reform was "a measure essentially necessary to the salvation of the state, and to the stability of your boasted constitution". The "excellency" of the constitution, Muir told his jury,

"consists in the due balance of its three impelling powers, King, Lords and Commons; if one of these powers becomes only a shadow of what it ought to be, if it becomes merged and absorbed into either of the other two, your constitution then also becomes a shadow, and it is annihilated."¹¹⁶

"Impressed with these views" on the danger to the constitution and therefore to the liberties which the constitution protected, various associations, Muir's biographer tells us, were formed throughout the country for the purpose of procuring a parliamentary reform. Their objects, he stated, were

"To preserve, or rather to restore, the purity of the British Constitution, to repress the overgrown influence of the Crown, to secure the independence of the House of Commons, to render its members what they pretended to be, the representatives of the people, and to consolidate their interest with that of the nation, [and] to stem the torrent of corruption and prodigality."¹¹⁷

115. The Glasgow Magazine, September 1795, 123.

116. Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 191-192.

117. The Glasgow Magazine, September 1795, 123-124.

As we shall see, the popular radical clubs of the 1790s frequently echoed the ideological arguments of the 'advanced' Whigs. Historians should not, however, fall into the error of the contemporary conservative critics of popular radicalism and attribute this to the educational activities of disgruntled Whig gentlemen. Men of more humble social rank did not need to be taught about political corruption by Whig ideologues; they knew all about it themselves, were equally vociferous in denouncing it, and were less keen than the Whigs of Millar's school to place the blame at the door of the wicked Crown and its Ministers. The Edinburgh clerk Robert Fergusson (1750-1774), for example, denounced the political corruption which he regarded as a consequence of the detested Union of 1707. In his poem 'The Ghaists', which takes the form of an imaginary conversation between the ghosts of George Heriot and George Watson¹¹⁸, George Heriot states

"I find, my friend! that ye but little ken,
 There's e'en now on the earth a set o' men,
 Wha, if they get their private pouches lin'd,
 Gie na a winnlestrae for a' mankind.
 They'll sell their country, flae their conscience bare,
 To gar the weigh-bauk tun a single hair,
 The Government need only bait the line
 Wi' the prevailin flee - the gowdin coin!

118. The benefactors of two Edinburgh schools instituted to provide education for the sons of poor burgesses. Fergusson has his characters discuss a scheme to vest the funds of charitable institutions, such as these schools, in government stock earning interest at three per cent. Fergusson regarded the scheme as a scandalous political job whereby the Trustees virtually handed over the funds of the institutions to government in exchange for bribes.

"Then our executors, and wise trustees,
 Will sell them fishes in forbidden seas:
 Upo' their dwinin country girn in sport;
 Laugh in their sleeve, and get a place at court."¹¹⁹

Political corruption was a favourite subject of Fergusson's great admirer, the Ayrshire tenant-farmer, Robert Burns (1759-1796). In 'The Author's Earnest Cry and Prayer' which was addressed to the Scottish members of Parliament, Burns probably summed up the attitude of the common man to the bribery and corruption integral to the working of the eighteenth century political system. He wrote,

"Let posts an' pensions sink or soom
 Wi' them wha grant 'em:
 If honestly they canna come,
 Far better want 'em."¹²⁰

Many such quotations could be adduced to illustrate the great poet's contempt for the unreformed system and the gentlemen who worked it, but one more must suffice.

"Come, will ye court a noble lord,
 Or buy a score o' lairds, man?
 For Worth and Honour pawn their word,
 Their vote shall be Glencaird's man.
 Ane gies them coin, ane gies them wine,
 Another gies them clatter;
 Annbank, wha guessed the ladies' taste,
 He gies a Fête Champetre."¹²¹

119. "The Works of Robert Fergusson. To which is prefixed a sketch of the author's life." (London, 1807) 326-327.

120. ed W.E. Henley and I.F. Henderson. "The Poetry of Robert Burns", I, (Edinburgh, 1896), 27.

121. IBID, II, 174.

James Thomson, the weaver poet of Kenleith, near Edinburgh, was a man with a more conservative mind than Burns, but he had an equally low opinion of the politicians of his time. In a poem entitled 'On meeting with a Gentleman at the Grave-stone of Mr. Robert Fergusson' Thomson, who was a deeply religious man, pondered death and observed that in death

"Nae bribe the statesman there doth mind!"¹²²

The corruption of a political system where burgh members of Parliament were frequently elected by the weight of their purse and county representatives according to how many fictitious votes they could create was so notorious that even conservative pamphleteers in the 1790s had to admit it. The Rev. Dr. Stevenson Macgill (1765-1840), the minister of Eastwood parish near Glasgow, told his parishioners that, while he spoke to warn them of the dangers of political radicalism, he would not become "the advocate of corruption", nor would he "seek to screen corruptions, or hesitate to stigmatise them with their true name."¹²³ The Rev. James Stewart (1745-1819), the Relief minister of Anderston, then a village on the outskirts of Glasgow, who urged moral rather than political reform, stated that when this reform had taken place

"Then reformation would adorn the State, for honest men would hold the reins of government, men who were patriots indeed, who, while they talked of the public good, had it really at heart. The great Senate of the Nation would not be disgraced and debased with worthless characters, abandoned

122. J. Thomson. "Poems by James Thomson weaver of Kenleith". (London, 1894), 90.

123. S. Macgill. "The Spirit of the Times: considered in an address to the people of Eastwood". (Glasgow, 1792), 4.

"libertines, infatuated gamesters, audacious blasphemers, men drowned in sensuality as deep as they are drowned in debt; nor would a venal mercenary band be found so base as to betray their country, and to support any measures for a place or a pension."¹²⁴

The degeneracy of the nation and the corruption of the political system were the favourite themes of other religious writers who were to draw very different political conclusions from those of the Rev. James Stewart. To men such as the Rev. Niel Douglas (1758-1823), the Relief minister of Cupar and, later, Dundee,¹²⁵ who served as a delegate from the Dundee Society of the Friends of the Constitution to the 3rd Convention in October 1793¹²⁶, the scandalous state of the nation's morals was due to the evil influence of the higher classes in society,¹²⁷ whose immorality infected both the political system and the life of the nation as a whole like a malignant cancer. Douglas

124. J. Stewart. "A Plan of Reform, proposed to the Christian People, a Sermon preached at Anderston the First Day of the New Year" (Glasgow, 1793), 18-19.

125. Douglas was licensed by the Relief Presbytery of Glasgow in August 1783 and ordained minister at Cupar "probably before the end of 1785". He remained in Cupar until he accepted a call from the West Port congregation of Dundee in December 1792, transferring there in 1793. R. Small, op cit, I, 181-182.

126. Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 392.

127. "There is little reason to hope that reformation will become effectual, till it begin with the Great, who at present chiefly need it; for while they remain corrupt and dissipated, their conduct, like so many poisoned fountains, still emitting noxious streams, will not fail to taint the lower classes of mankind." "Britannicus" (pseud of N. Douglas). "A Monitory Address to Great Britain; a poem in six parts" (Edinburgh, 1792), XXIII-XXIV.

looked at the balls, theatrical plays, card-playing, gambling, horse-racing, cock-fighting, boxing and hunting, which he characterised as the "vain gods" to whom "our modern great" paid homage,¹²⁸ and sorrowfully exclaimed "Hath not a flood of vice our land o'erspread."¹²⁹ This flood of corruption, he believed, had undermined the Constitution of 1688 (which he much admired¹³⁰), much as a worm eats at the root and ultimately destroys "the fairest fruit".¹³¹ To Douglas the connection between private and public immorality was crystal clear. In terms reminiscent of Professor Millar, he explained that

"When men possessing no fixed principles of honour, virtue, or religion, live in a mode of expense and magnificence, beyond what their stated income will bear, to what illicit expedients will they not have recourse, in order to support their extravagance, and what line of conduct so base and flagitious, but they will adopt, provided a proper temptation presents itself."¹³²

Consequently, he argued, venality prevailed in both Church and State¹³³, and the House of Commons had become a "den of knaves" and "Satan's

128. IBID, 16.

129. IBID, 12.

130. IBID, 5-6.

131. IBID, 84. "Corruption is a worm that gnaws the root, And will infect and blast the fairest fruit."

132. IBID, 83, fn.

133. IBID, 82. "In Church and State venality prevails, The highest bidder in his suit scarce fails."

slaves", to the offence of both God and man¹³⁴ and the imminent danger of the constitution.¹³⁵ Only the reformation of private and public morality could, he believed, turn back the tide of corruption, preserve the constitutional liberties of the "free-born Briton", and avert God's vengeance.¹³⁶ But, while political as well as moral reform was necessary, there was no need for revolutionary changes in the constitution.¹³⁷

Douglas spoke for many, but not all, dissenters in calling for moral and political reform. The Government¹³⁸ and its supporters¹³⁹

134. Of Parliament and the established Church, Douglas wrote - "If these become a den of artful knaves, Or the resort of Satan's willing slaves.. Will not all this give God and man offence?" IBID, 84.

135. "What Jugurtha said of old, according to the Roman historian, with regard to ancient Rome, as founded on his own experience of the venality and corruption of those in power and trust, in that once mighty state, applies but too well to many, perhaps to most of our boroughs, in cases of election and the like - 'This city may be bought, and will soon be ruined, if it find a purchaser'. In this he was not mistaken, for ancient Rome owed its rapid decline, and the total subversion of its government, to these very causes; and if they are found to prevail with us, what security can we have, that they will not produce similar effects?" IBID, 82, fn.

136. "Iniquity abounds, and almost all ranks proclaim their sin as Sodom, and hide it not. Do not our national depravity and guilt appear of late to be rapid in their increase.. It nearly concerns every subject, to exert himself in his place, to promote reformation of manners, and effectuate the discontinuance of such measures and practices as seem to threaten our national peace and prosperity", for, he warned, "tho' the Judge of all the earth may long exercise forbearance towards a guilty people... he will not, however, suffer them to pass always unpunished in this world." N. Douglas "Thoughts on Modern Politics" (London, 1793), 4-5.

137. "What prudent person would propose to demolish an ancient and stately fabric, in which he had long lived with ease and pleasure, in order to rear a new one, while a few slight repairs, which the unavoidable effects of time make necessary, are sufficient to render it both commodious, strong, and graceful? But, pursuing the similitude, necessary repairs, too long neglected, may endanger the ruin [sic] of the whole edifice." IBID, 10-11.

138. For example, the Lord Advocate, Robert Dundas, wrote to Henry Dundas, 10 October 1794, stating "that all that Description of Clergy and their Hearers are deeply disaffected." NLS Melville Papers, MSS 6, f193.

139. For example, when the ultra-conservative Sir William Murray of Ochertyre wrote to the Duke of Atholl, 7 July 1794, stating that he was sending him a list of all the men in his district "marking D. for democrat, S for suspected, O. for of unknown sympathies, L. known to be loyal and A. for aged" he added that "All dissenters" (i.e. seceders) except those known by him personally to be loyal" will be marked S." Atholl Papers. Blair-Atholl. 59, 1, f252.

equation of dissenter and radical reformer requires some qualification but has a basis in truth. While the ranks of the **dissenters** were to provide both conservative pamphleteers¹⁴⁰ and government informants¹⁴¹, it is significant that these pamphleteers tended to run into trouble

140. The most notable were the Rev. John Young (1743-1806), Antiburgher minister of Hawick and author of "Essays on the Following Interesting Subjects: viz. I. Government. II. Revolutions. III. The British Constitution. IV. Kingly Government. V. Parliamentary Representation and Reform. VI. Liberty and Equality. VII. Taxation, and VIII The Present War, and the Stagnation of Credit as Connected with it" (Edinburgh, 1794), the Rev. James Stewart (1745-1819), the Relief minister of Anderston and author of "A Plan of Reform, proposed to the Christian People, a Sermon preached at Anderston the First Day of the New Year". (Glasgow, 1793), and the Rev. Alexander Shanks (1732-1799) the Burgher minister of Jedburgh and author of "Peace and Order Recommended to Society, in an Address to the Associate Congregation of Jedburgh, from Jeremiah XXIX, 7." (Edinburgh, 1793).

141. "About the year 1795... some of the Leading Dissenting Clergy in Edinburgh conveyed to me privately their desire to see me at a confidential meeting... when they explicitly declared their determination as far as Prudence would permit to check all rebellious Doctrines among their Brethern... One Individual of their number [the Rev. Dr. James Hall (1756-1826) of Edinburgh] was pitched upon as the person with whom I was confidentially to communicate: And all that he stated or required was that our Intercourse should be as secret as possible, to render his services to be of any use, and that the expence of his Journies he would have to make from time to time through the country and other miscellaneous Items should be defrayed... and during the whole of the period I continued King's Advocate he regularly and accurately reported to me everything going forward amongst those numerous bodies of People and by his advice many effectual measures were taken for baffling the intrigues of some factious persons among them, and maintaining the peace of the districts in which these congregations are placed." Robert Dundas to Robert Saunders Dundas, 14 November 1807. NLS. Melville Papers MSS 8, ff 203-206.

with their congregations and their churches' governing bodies¹⁴² and that the government informers were employed to spy on the members of their own churches.¹⁴³ The number of seceding ministers who were involved in the reform movement and who voiced support for the movement is also of some significance. At least three ministers of the rigidly orthodox Antiburgher church served as delegates to the conventions of the Friends of the People. The Rev. John Wilson (1733-1803) of Methven

142. Robert Dundas wrote that "Mr. Young of Hawick... was punished by an almost total Desertion of his Auditory: and no pains spared to vilify and libel his Character both Religious and Political." NLS Melville Papers, MSS8, ff 203-206. The Rev. Dr. William Porteous wrote to Robert Dundas, 2 October 1794, stating that "Mr Young is likely to be seriously attacked by the Antiburgher Judicatures... Ther Synod at Edin^r growled at the pamphlet, but most part of the members were sullen and silent. The systematic attack seems to originate at Forfar - Their presbytery have appointed a committee of three to revise the pamphlet and to report whatever they find prejudicial to the seceding interest, without waiting for this report, they have already resolved to refer it to their general Synod." NLS Melville Papers MSS 6, ff 197-198.

McKerrow, the historian of the secession churches, records that a formal complaint was presented against Young at the meeting of the Antiburghers' General Synod in May 1795 charging that he had advanced opinions in his "Essays" inconsistent with the testimony of the Synod. A committee was appointed to determine whether the complaint was well-founded, but no further proceedings were taken against Young. J. McKerrow, *op cit*, II, 39-40. There can be little doubt that the Young case profoundly embarrassed the General Associate Synod who well realised that any disciplinary action against Young would appear to outsiders, including an alarmist and ruthlessly repressive government, as a statement of support for the radical reformers. Yet, if Young's work was allowed to pass by without comment it would equally appear that the Synod supported Young's position. The Synod seems to have decided that the best policy was to keep the threat of disciplinary action hanging over Young's head without doing anything to antagonise Government by implementing it.

143. The Rev. James Hall, the Government's most important agent in the Seceding community, wrote to Lord Advocate Dundas, 15 April 1799, stating that a Relief congregation "in the new part of Glasgow" had offered him the post of minister. "I am confident", he added, "that the beneficial consequences which would result from successful exertions to bring the different dissenting Clergymen in Scotland and particularly in Glasgow and the West Country into a proper train of Political Sentiment and Conduct, would abundantly compensate both the labour and the expence. If we have not already been too late in an attempt to pervade the middling and lower classes of the community with an influence of principle directly opposite to that which has corrupted then it is now high time that the experiment should be made." Edinburgh University Library (henceforth EUL) Laing MSS. Division II. No. 500-501. See also fn 141.

near Perth, who was one of the leaders of the Perth Association,¹⁴⁴ was delegated from Perth to the 1st Convention, while the Revs. James Robertson (1750-1811)¹⁴⁵ and Frederick McFarlane (dates unknown)¹⁴⁶, of Kilmarnock and Montrose respectively, served as delegates at the 2nd Convention in April 1793. The Rev. James McEwan (1750x1751-1813) of Dundee, whose jocular cast of mind strongly conflicts with the stereotype of secession ministers so beloved of some historians,¹⁴⁷ attended a meeting of the radical Society for Constitutional Information in London on 11 April 1794¹⁴⁸ and was, around the same time, elected by the Dundee Friends of Liberty as their delegate to the proposed second British

144. "The Rev. 'Mr. Wilson' was named as one of 'the leading Men' in the Perth Association by an anonymous and well-informed government informer. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH 2/4/64, f 341. Wilson was delegated by Perth to the 1st Convention. Meikle, op cit, 240.

145. "In the Courts of the Antiburgher Church he had long taken a leading part, and was never accustomed to express himself tamely on any subject that came before him." Robertson was regarded as a great preacher, "though in the pulpit his language is said to have been plain and his similes homely." He was a knowledgeable and well-read man, possessing a large and valuable library of 3,000 books "in many languages." R. Small, op cit, II, 288. Robertson was delegated by Kilmarnock to the 2nd Convention of the Friends of the People. Meikle, op cit, 275. The commission of the Kilmarnock Societies, 25 October 1793, delegating John Ronaldson and Thomas Boyd to the 3rd Convention named Robertson as their President. JC 26/280.

146. It was reported from Montrose, 24 February 1793, that "McFarlane's society keeps very frequent meetings" and that McFarlane "continues to intermix in his sermons his political notions." Mrs Susan Bean to [H. Dundas?], 24 February 1793. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH 2/4/69, ff 357-358. McFarlane was delegated by the Montrose society to the 2nd Convention. Meikle, op cit, 275.

147. R. Small, op cit, I, 289, states that McEwan's "cast of mind occasionally led him into the ludicrous in conduct, or to be more jocular than the gravity of his office allowed." The "grim consciousness of their superior godliness and purity" that H.G. Graham and others have thought so distinctive of eighteenth century seceders is perhaps more typical of nineteenth century evangelicals. H.G. Graham. "The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century." (London, 1900), I, 263.

148. Howell, State Trials, XXIV, 564.

Convention¹⁴⁹. Moreover, although Archibald Bruce, the Antiburgher's Professor of Divinity, did not attend any of the conventions and does not seem to have joined any of the reform societies, his reasons for so doing were probably personal rather than political. He echoed Douglas in denouncing the immorality of the times¹⁵⁰ and the corruption of the political system,¹⁵¹ and in advancing parliamentary and religious reform

149. Declaration of George Mealmaker, 18 June 1794. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH 2/4/76, f 130.

150. Bruce believed that he was witnesssing in the decline of religion and in falling standards of private and public morality the coming of anti-christ to an ascendancy in Britain. "A spirit of lordly dominion", he stated, "spiritual tyranny, and impositions on the understanding and consciences of men, have been too generally prevalent. Considerations of interest, false maxims of honour; custom, or human laws, have, with many, superceded the observance of the plainest precepts in morality or religion. A wanton and perverse exaction of oaths, as well as perfidious use of them, in political matters, or in ordinary affairs of trade, has been a notorious evil, no less than customary profane swearing. Fraudulent dealings, infamous arts, and some branches of unjust, and inhuman traffic, have become common, particularly the horrid African slave-trade, not yet abolished. The great and wealthy, while they wallow in sinful excesses and pleasures, too often forget the distresses and burdens of the poor and industrious... Destructive and often unnecessary unjust wars, have too long, engaged the courts and kingdoms of Europe... The kings of the earth, corrupt statesmen, and prelates, who have been intoxicated with the wine of Rome's fornication, shew themselves averse to separate their interests fairly from hers, but rather behold the visible and speedy ruin that is falling upon her, with grief and horror." A Bruce, "A Serious View", 39-40.

151. "If it be true", he wrote, "as has often been asserted, and never disproved, that in Britain corruption, in various branches, has grown to such a scandalous height, as to outrage all morality and common honesty, as well as religion; - if places of public trust are openly bought and sold, if the representatives of a nation are rendered mercenary and servile by bribery and undue influence; if oaths and perjuries are nothing accounted of; if profusion, drunkenness, riot, and intrigue, are the chief marks of the times for public elections; if interest and gain may be allowed to assert their claims in opposition to the laws of justice and morality; if many enormities like these prevail, why should any man be condemned, for giving his voice or quota of assistance for providing a remedy?" A. Bruce. "A Brief Statement and Declaration of the Genuine Principles of Seceders, respecting Civil Government, the Duty of Subjects, and National Reformation : and a Vindication of their Conduct in reference to some late plans and societies for political reform; and the public dissensions of the time." (N.P., 1799), 51.

as the solution for these ills. Like his heroes of the Covenanting struggles of the seventeenth century "from the eminent Guthrie down to Renwick [who] are accounted martyrs for liberty as well as religion,"¹⁵² he sought to promote both causes at the same time. The old Covenanter argued that

"Civil and ecclesiastical liberty are but two great branches of the same expanded tree. They have ever been found most intimately allied. They have both had the same common enemies; and nearly the same pretexts and methods have been employed to undermine and destroy both... These considerations should inspire the friends of civil and ecclesiastical liberty, and the promoters of political and ecclesiastical reform, with unanimity."¹⁵³

In case anyone should miss the point, Bruce categorically stated that "The North British Protestant is glad to see so many spirited advocates raised up to plead the cause of political freedom, and the right of prosecuting a civil reform."¹⁵⁴ Elsewhere, he added, "that there were declarations and resolutions from particular societies [of the Friends of the People], so expressed, as that any friends of religious reform [i.e. Antiburghers] might without scruple have adopted them."¹⁵⁵

The Rev. Dr. George Lawson (1749-1820), the Burgher minister of Selkirk and Professor of Divinity, held similar political opinions to those of Bruce. It is not certain if he ever became a member of the

152. A. Bruce, "A Serious View", 81.

153. A. Bruce, "Reflections on the Freedom of Writing", III.

154. IBID, V.

155. A. Bruce, "A Serious View", 70.

Society of the Friends of the People, but his sympathy for their cause is clear.¹⁵⁶ As with Bruce, Lawson argued passionately in support of the freedom of the press, urged forbearance and toleration in political debate, and criticised the persecuting spirit of the conservatism of his day.¹⁵⁷ Like Bruce too, he condemned the loyalist declarations

156. "The Rev^d Mr. Lawson, Selkirk" is named in a "List of Persons" which was probably drawn up by William Skirving, the secretary of the Edinburgh Association of the Friends of the People, some time in 1793. It may well be a correspondence list, but it is doubtful if Lawson was the secretary of the Selkirk society. Two letters, dated 29 April and 29 October 1793, have been discovered dealing with the affairs of the Selkirk society. Both letters were written by Joseph Smithson who seems to have been the secretary of the Selkirk society. Nevertheless, the presence of Lawson's name in Skirving's list of radical contacts throughout Scotland shows that Lawson's political opinions were no mystery to the Edinburgh radicals. "List of Persons", JC 26/280. J. Smithson to W. Skirving, 29 April 1793, and IBID to IBID, 29 October 1793. JC 26/280.

157. In a tract written during "the stormy days of Muir and Palmer" Lawson argued that "We ought to cultivate friendship with our neighbours who differ from us in political views... what title have you to assume the province of the great Judge who searcheth the hearts and trieth the reins of the children of men? Consider the effect that different educations, and different turns of mind, and different sets of acquaintance, and different capacities and degrees of attention, and better or worse means of information, have in diversifying men's judgment on the same subject... Perhaps you are an enemy to all those meetings which have assembled to deliberate on an application to Parliament for a redress of public grievances. Enjoy your own opinion. Act in pursuance of it. But violate not the charity you owe to your neighbours who differ from you. Accuse them not of seditious principles without proof." J. Macfarlane. "The Life and Times of George Lawson, D.D. Selkirk, Professor of Theology to the Associate Synod. With glimpses of Scottish character from 1720 to 1820." (Edinburgh, 1862), 393-394. Archibald Bruce argued the case more aggressively. He stated that "There must be reserved a power of discussing, of judging, objecting to, and of changing, by the laws of permanent reason and justice, not only the particular laws, but the discriminating form of its settled government, its very constitution upon settled grounds, as when any of them are radically bad, or are become grievous and oppressive; seeing they are ordinances of constitutions merely human, and have no claim to support when they either are incompatible with a higher and more sacred law, or with the immediate end for which they are appointed, general good." A. Bruce, "Reflections on the Freedom of Writing", 73.

of 1792-1793,¹⁵⁸ and supported the cause of parliamentary reform.

Writing during the dark days of 1793 he bravely argued that "We ought to concur in every regular and seasonable attempt to improve the advantages, and to obtain redress of the grievances of our country,"¹⁵⁹ and, when an indiscreet political conversation in the even darker days of 1794 led to him being reported to the Sheriff of Selkirkshire, he wrote to the Sheriff's wife stating that he was fully convinced of the constitutionalism of the radical reformers' proceedings and objectives and that he "favoured their views."¹⁶⁰

Lawson of Selkirk, the Rev. William Kidston (1728x1729-1808) of Stow and the Rev. Ebenezer Hislop (1746-1831) of Shotts were three Burgher ministers named in a correspondence list probably drawn up by William Skirving (died 1796), a fellow Burgher¹⁶¹ and secretary of the Edinburgh Association of the Friends of the People, in 1793.¹⁶²

158. Lawson stated that "We ought not to be forward in signing tests of loyalty; especially when the laws of the land do not require it." J. Macfarlane, op cit, 395-396. Bruce stated that "To engage to support the measures of administration, or even the constitution in such a view, is no longer zeal for protestantism, and loyalty to the reigning family, but is a declaration of enmity, an avowal of persecution against fellow protestants, and a making public protestations and rash views against all reform, from whatever quarter proposed, and by whatever means promoted." A Bruce, "Reflections on the Freedom of Writing", 132-133.

159. J. Macfarlane, op cit, 396.

160. IBID, 384-385.

161. Skirving had originally intended to become a minister of the Burgher church and had consequently attended the University of Edinburgh and the Burgher Theological College. Having decided that the ministry was not for him, he took up farming instead, made a study of scientific methods of agriculture, and when the University of Edinburgh set up a Chair of Agriculture in 1790 applied unsuccessfully for the post. P. Mackenzie. "The Trial of William Skirving, with an original memoir and notes." (Glasgow, 1836), 3.

162. "List of Persons", JC 26/280.

The specific purpose of this list is unclear,¹⁶³ but that it contained the names of political contacts throughout Scotland is obvious enough. Neither Kidston nor Lawson appear to have attended any of the radicals' conventions, but Hislop, "The Reverent Democrat",¹⁶⁴ was delegated by his local Shotts society to the 1st Convention.¹⁶⁵ In Stirling, which had a large Burgher population¹⁶⁶ and, in 1792, a thriving Society of the Friends of the People, it was reported, by James Sommerville (1747-1817), the parish minister, that the "daemon" of "political jealousy" resulted in part "from dissentient principles in religion."¹⁶⁷ In Perth, where several of the seceding clergy took a prominent part in the reform movement,¹⁶⁸ the assistant Burgher minister, the Rev. Jedidiah

163. The list may be a record of those whom Skirving wished to inform of the arrival of the English delegates to the British Convention in early November 1793 and of the consequent recall of the Scottish delegates. The list refers to one "Wm. Scot, Watch-maker, Lauder", and Skirving informed the Edinburgh General Committee of the formation of a new society at Lauder on 14 November 1793. As Skirving's papers were seized by the authorities in December 1793, this would seem to date the list to the period November-December 1793 and perhaps link it with the calling of the British Convention. "List of Persons" and "Minutes of the Monthly Committee, 14 November 1793" JC 26/280.

164. R. Small, op cit, II, 231.

165. Meikle, op cit, 240.

166. Out of a total population of 4,698, 2795 adhered to the Church of Scotland and 1,415 to the Burgher Church. OSA, VIII, 282. Stirling was of course the parish of the Rev. Ebenezer Erskine, the father of the Secession.

167. OSA, VIII, 295.

168. G. Penny, op cit, 70. Robert Heron commented interestingly that "religious zeal and pride... are apt to extend their operation beyond their proper sphere, and to blend themselves with political, no less than with religious, prejudices. And these have undoubtedly had their share in promoting that desire of reforming the state which seems to be at present, felt with such violence by great numbers of the citizens of Perth." R. Heron, op cit, I, 148-149.

Aikman (1751-1833), was known as a "staunch democrat."¹⁶⁹ Moreover, James Craigdallie, a Perth weaver and radical who became a United Scotsman and was accused of sedition, may be the same James Craigdallie who played a notable part in the Old Light-New Light controversy within the Burgher community in Perth during the later 1790s.¹⁷⁰

Struthers, the historian of the Relief Church, has argued that the Relief ministry showed no inclination to involve themselves in the radical cause and "strove to keep each man's conscience busy in checking his own misdeeds."¹⁷¹ His argument is defective, apparently being based upon the Rev. James Stewart's pamphlet, which he took to be representative of opinion throughout the church. However, as with the Antiburghers and the Burghers, the connections between the Relief Church and the radical reform movement are both suggestive and worthy of notice. Niel Douglas was the only Relief minister, so far as is known, to attend a convention of the Friends of the People, but it is surely not without significance that meetings of radical reformers, both in the 1790s and in the post-war phase of the agitation, were held in Relief churches.¹⁷²

169. G. Penny, op cit, 174.

170. R. Small, op cit, II, 552.

171. G. Struthers. "The History of the Rise, Progress and Principles of the Relief Church". (Glasgow, 1843), 383.

172. For example, a meeting of the Perth Friends of the People to elect delegates to one of the Conventions was held in the Relief Church there. G. Penny, op cit, 68. A meeting of the Paisley radicals in October 1816, which called for universal suffrage and annual parliaments, was held in the West Relief Church there. W.M. Roach. "Radical Reform Movements in Scotland from 1815 to 1822, with particular reference to events in the West of Scotland". University of Glasgow, Ph.D., 1970, 38-39. Roach, who pointed out that many such meetings took place in dissenting churches in the post-war period, added cautiously that this "could merely indicate toleration rather than support for political reform." IBID, 361.

Furthermore, when, in 1794, John Fairley was sent by that curious revolutionary Robert Watt (1759?-1794) on an intelligence gathering tour of radical groups in west-central Scotland, he contacted the Rev. Archibald Cross (1759x1760-1803), the Relief minister at St. Ninians,¹⁷³ the Rev. John Anderson (1769x1770-1862), the Relief minister at Kilsyth,¹⁷⁴ and the Rev. Mr. Wheeler at Campsie, whom he subsequently described as a Relief minister.¹⁷⁵ It might also be noted that George Mealmaker (1768-1808), a Dundee weaver who played an important role in the Dundee Society of the Friends of Liberty, served as a delegate at the 3rd and British Conventions, and was sentenced to fourteen years transportation in 1798 for his activities as a United Scotsman, was an elder in the Relief Church.¹⁷⁶

If 'Old Dissent' was, at least in part, scandalised by the corruption and irreligion of eighteenth century society in general and of the governing, upper classes, in particular, and attracted to parliamentary reform as a means of rectifying the situation, so too was a newer phenomenon, rational dissent. Alexander Christie, a Montrose

173. Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 1291. IBID, XXIV, 104 and 109. Cross, a Glaswegian, was the Relief minister at Biggar from 1782 to 1784 when he was translated to St. Ninians. R. Small, op cit, II, 700.

174. Howell, State Trials, XXIV, 104. Anderson was ordained Relief minister of Kilsyth on 12 September 1793. R. Small, op cit, I, 686-687.

175. Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 1291-1292. There is no record of a "Wheeler" being Relief minister of Campsie at this time. Indeed, there is no record of any Relief, Burgher, Antiburgher, or Church of Scotland minister of that name ministering in that part of Scotland at that time. It is possible that the Wheeler referred to by Fairley was a licentiate or student of the Relief, or some other, Church who was never ordained. Wheeler's identity however remains unresolved.

176. Mealmaker attended the Synod of Relief in May 1797 as Commissioner from the Dundee Relief Church. "Declaration of George Mealmaker, 9 November 1797". JC 26/281. See also Howell, State Trials, XXVI, 1156 where Mealmaker's membership of the Relief Church is recorded.

merchant who held for "several years"¹⁷⁷ the provostship of the burgh and who had been converted to Unitarianism, published in 1790 the revealingly entitled pamphlet "Scripture Truths, humbly addressed to the serious consideration of all Christians, particularly such as are Candidates for a seat in Parliament, and their Electors, at the ensuing General Election."¹⁷⁸ Christie, who shared with Burns a fondness for Pope's maxim that "An honest man's the noblest work of God",¹⁷⁹ set out in this work to show "the unhappy and evil consequences of falsehood, bribery, and corruption of every kind, and the present and future advantages of truth, honour and honesty to themselves [i.e. the candidates and the electors] and the nation."¹⁸⁰ The work may be read as a simple homily which sought nothing more radical than to convert the political nation to a more godly and virtuous life; but it stands also as a testimony to the moral disgust of the ordinary, God-fearing, Christians of late-eighteenth century Scotland for the sort of men who governed them. When Christie cried out "Provide out of all the people, able men such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness, and place such over them,"¹⁸¹ he was not thinking of the burgh councillors who judged a parliamentary candidate's suitability by the size of his bribes, of the country gentleman who pledged themselves to a candidate according to the receipt or promise of favours, or of statesmen who utilised the patronage machine to maintain themselves in power.

177. The Dictionary of National Biography, IV, 285.

178. A. Christie. "Scripture Truths, humbly addressed to the serious consideration of all Christians, particularly such as are Candidates for a seat in Parliament, and their Electors at the ensuing General Election." (Montrose, 1790).

179. IBID, Titlepage.

180. IBID, Titlepage.

181. IBID, 14. The quotation is Exodus, 18, 21.

If both seceder and rational dissenter held common ground in denouncing the corruption of the political system and those who operated it, they diverged on the issue of ecclesiastical corruption. Both agreed that the established churches were corrupt, but while the seceder looked forward to the creation, or rather the restoration, of a purified establishment freed from the doctrinal heresies of the Moderates and independent of both landed patron and state influence, the rational dissenters, and increasingly the Relief Church,¹⁸² rejected religious establishments as thoroughly evil in themselves and harmful to both Christianity and civil liberty. By means of such establishments, Alexander Christie argued, Christianity had

"been robbed of its genuine purity and simplicity, its pious and benevolent tendency perverted, and the noblest gift of Heaven to mortals, degraded to the level of a mere State engine, under the management of the Magistrate and Churchman; and made use of by them, for the purpose of supporting their power.. and for persecuting in every shape, even unto death!"¹⁸³

182. G. Struthers, op cit, 382.

183. A. Christie. "The Holy Scriptures the only Rule of Faith, and Religious Liberty asserted and maintained." (Montrose, 1790), 34. See also William Christie (1748-1823), "An Essay on Ecclesiastical Establishments in Religion: shewing their hurtful tendency; and that they cannot be defended, either on principles of reason or Scripture. To which are annexed, Two Discourses." (Montrose, 1791), passim. Thomas Fyshe Palmer (1747-1802), a former Fellow of Queen's College Cambridge, who had been converted to Unitarianism and had, on resigning his Fellowship, removed to Scotland to preach, had an equally low opinion of church establishments. He remarked sarcastically of the English Episcopates "incorruptable integrity in Parliament, their heavenly mindedness, their hatred of filthy lucre and translations to greater incomes." He wrote that "To a King whom our representatives in parliament set over the nation, we will pay a cheerful civil obedience; but to a parliamentary god, to a god whom Constantine first set up, we must as peremptorily refuse to bow down, as David and his companions to Nebuchadnezzar's." T.F. Palmer. "An Attempt to Refute a Sermon by H.D. Inglis, on the Godhead of Jesus Christ, and to restore the long lost truth of the First Commandment." (Edinburgh, 1792), VII and VIII.

The voluntarism of the rational dissenters was based upon a sturdy individualism which regarded religious belief and practice as matters solely between the individual and God. "I only wished you", Alexander Christie declared, "to examine and enquire, consulting the Bible alone, judging from it and not from human creeds, seeing with your own eyes, and not with those of others. It is enough for me to endeavour to judge right for myself."¹⁸⁴ Thus, as Thomas Christie (1761-1796), another member of the Unitarian Christie clan from Montrose, put it, "civil governors... have no business to interfere with religion, which ought to rest entirely between God and a man's own conscience."¹⁸⁵ The Test laws, which deprived English dissenters of all military and most civil offices unless they conformed to the worship of the Church of England, were anathema to the rational dissenters of North Britain, who lamented "that in the present enlightened and liberal age... penal laws for conscience sake should still exist among us.. and that at best we have but a mutilated toleration."¹⁸⁶ Alexander Christie stated that "No government however much they may have assumed it have any right to deprive any one of its subjects of civil right on account of his religion."¹⁸⁷ When therefore revolutionary France, by granting a "Universal Liberty of Conscience", acknowledged that the state had no right to debar a man from holding office on account of his religious beliefs, the move was welcomed enthusiastically by British rational dissenters who had been campaigning unsuccessfully for the repeal of the hated Test and Corporation Acts since 1787.

184. A. Christie, "The Holy Scriptures the Only Rule of Faith", 8.

185. T. Christie. "Letters on the Revolution of France, and on the New Constitution established by the National Assembly: occasioned by the publications of the Right Hon Edmund Burke, M.P. and Alexander de Calonne, late minister of state." Part 1, (London, 1791), 12-13.

186. A. Christie, "The Holy Scriptures the Only Rule of Faith" 35.

187. IBID, 37.

'New Dissent' welcomed the French Revolution as a triumph for the principles it held most dear over the forces it most abhorred. The debate between the rational dissenters and the supporters of 'Old Corruption', championed by Edmund Burke, was not essentially about a revolution in a foreign country, but about conflicting political philosophies and the desirability of applying them in Britain. Thus, while Thomas Christie devoted much space in his 'Letters on the Revolution in France' to correcting Burke's view of the revolution he also wrote at length about the principles of the British Revolution of 1688, defended the political principles of the rational dissenters in general and of his friend Dr. Richard Price (1723-1791) in particular from Burke's intemperate attacks, and mused on the benefits of applying 'rational' principals to British government. No one could read Christie's comments on the corruption of France under the ancien regime and the expected moral regeneration of revolutionary France without concluding that he believed that a similar regeneration would flow from political reformation in Britain as well.¹⁸⁸ Less obliquely, however,

188. He wrote, "And what I think was still worse than its tyranny in the ancient government of France, because the effects of it were still more destructive to morals, was its corruption and venality. From the highest to the lowest degree of it, all was a system of favouritism, instead of justice. Talents and abilities were nothing without interest, and the skill of flattering others... Hence no man trusted to the goodness of his cause, but to the protection of some individual more powerful than himself. Hence honour, principle and manly spirit were destroyed, and the nation became a people of flatterers and hypocrites." A few pages earlier he had defended the French Revolution as "the only revolution that has completely respected the rights of mankind. It is the only revolution that is likely to change the object of ambition amongst men, and to convert it into an emulation of superior wisdom and virtue, instead of a lust of power and conquest." T. Christie, op cit, 65 and 59.

he linked his discussion of the new electoral system in France with that pertaining in Scotland. Having described how Primary Assemblies at Canton level elected the Department's Electoral Assembly which in turn elected both the Department's administrative Assembly and its representatives to the National Assembly, he remarked that the new French system

"resembles the constitution of the towns in Scotland, where the Magistrates or Municipal Assembly chuse an Assembly of Delegates, and these delegates appoint the member of parliament. It is far superior to it in another respect, for the Electoral Assemblies of France are chosen by the Primary Assemblies, which consist of all the citizens, except paupers, servants, and bankrupts; while the delegates of Scotland are appointed by municipal officers, who elect one another in succession, ad infinitum, without the concurrence of, and frequently contrary to the general sense of the citizens."¹⁸⁹

The constitution of the royal burghs in his native Scotland, he declared, "is so peculiarly vicious and absurd that I think it is impossible it can subsist for any length of time." Moreover, he added, the number of burgh reformers was "constantly increasing; and their complaints, being founded on reason, must soon be attended to."¹⁹⁰ To aid the Scottish burgh reformers in their task of drawing up proposals for a new municipal constitution Christie gave a detailed account of the new French system in which the franchise was vested in the so-called 'active citizens.' This system had his full support: the French

189. IBID, 155-156.

190. IBID, 183.

Assembly, he declared, "have advanced it as near to perfection as the condition of man will permit."¹⁹¹ Christie clearly wished to apply the principles of French revolutionary government to Scotland, but, like the bourgeois revolutionaries in France and his fellow burgh reformers in Scotland, he had no wish to admit the lower orders, the 'passive citizens,' into the political nation. If governments, he wrote, were to be stable they must respect public opinion, -

"I do not mean the opinion merely of numbers, the predominant opinion of uninformed multitudes, who may be said to have no opinions; but I mean the opinion of the reflecting and enlightened part of the community. The opinion of others can afford no stable basis for a governor to rest his authority on, because it has no stability in itself."¹⁹²

It is tempting to regard the phenomenon and ideology of rational dissent as quintessentially bourgeois, but, while little is known about the social composition of its congregations, it seems clear that it attracted very little support in Scotland among the bourgeoisie, and indeed among the wider community as a whole. When, in 1792, Thomas Fyshe Palmer dedicated his defence of Unitarian doctrine to the Unitarian congregations of Dundee, Edinburgh, Forfar, Arbroath, Montrose and Newburgh¹⁹³ it is difficult, bearing in mind both Palmer's status as a 'Star' preacher and the private wealth which gave him an unusual degree of mobility, not to conclude that he was listing not only those congregations with which he had been personally involved but also the entire number of Unitarian congregations in the east of Scotland at that

191. IBID, 197.

192. IBID, 43-44.

193. T.F. Palmer, op cit, V.

time. In the west Unitarianism may have been even weaker. The only congregation known to have existed at the time was in Glasgow where a "preaching room" had been opened in 1787.¹⁹⁴

The weakness of 'New Dissent' in Scotland prevented it from playing the same role as in England, where the agitation of 1787-1790 for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts "precipitated the emergence.. of High Tory conservatism and Dissenting radicalism."¹⁹⁵ Whereas in England it was the rational dissenters who were popularly perceived as threatening liberty,¹⁹⁶ in Scotland it was the Moderate Party within the Church of Scotland itself and their allies, a governing class more than tinged with rationalist heresy, who were popularly perceived as constituting the threat.¹⁹⁷ The governing class in Scotland were as hostile to rational dissent as their counterparts in England,¹⁹⁸ but while Church and King mobs could be raised with relative

194. A. MacWhirter. "Unitarianism in Scotland" in "Records of the Scottish Church History Society," XIII, Pt. 11, (1958), 122.

195. A. Goodwin, op cit, 81.

196. E.P. Thomson. "The Making of the English Working Class" (Pelican edn. 1974), 85. "The Gordon Rioters of 1780 and the 'Church and King' rioters in Birmingham in 1791 had this in common; they felt themselves, in some obscure way, to be defending the 'Constitution' against alien elements who threatened their 'birthright'. They had been taught for so long that the Revolution settlement of 1688, embodied in the Constitution of King, Lords and Commons, was the guarantee of British independence and liberties, that the reflex had been set up - Constitution equals Liberty."

197. See Chapter 1.

198. The Lord Provost of Edinburgh, James Stirling, wrote to the Home Secretary, Henry Dundas, 7 March 1792, informing him of the opening of a Unitarian meeting house in the city and stating that the authorities had prevented the Unitarians from putting up hand-bills advertising the fact. Scottish Record Office (henceforth SRO). Melville Papers, GD 51/5/637, f1. A few days later Lord Advocate Dundas wrote, "The Unitarian Advertisement is a very improper, and a very insolent Paper. But I doubt very much the expediency of any Public notice being taken of it. It should be treated as the raving of some madman. My hope is, the good people of Edin' will rise and pull the house to pieces; and sure I am their conduct in doing so should be winked at. If the business is however carried farther, or appears to excite any general disapprobation, consult the Solicitor (General) as to the propriety of taking notice of it, and the mode of doing so, which appears to me at present a little doubtful how to proceed." R. Dundas to J. Davidson, London, 19 March 1792. EUL. Laing MSS. Division II, No. 294.

ease in England to intimidate both dissenters and radicals no such bodies could be mobilised in Scotland. In Scotland the 'lower orders' were infinitely more likely to riot to prevent the installation of an unpopular presentee, foisted upon them by a landed patron and a Moderate dominated Church court, than to attack a Unitarian meeting house.¹⁹⁹

Rational dissent may not have played the same crucial role as in England, but its contribution to the making of the Scottish radical reform movement is nevertheless worthy of notice. That contribution was most noticeable in Tayside. William Christie (1748-1823), an uncle of the author of 'Letters on the Revolution of France' and the founder, at Montrose about 1782, of the first Unitarian church in Scotland,²⁰⁰ was an active figure in Tayside radicalism who presided over and dominated²⁰¹ the St. Cyrus society of the Friends of the People and represented it at the 1st Convention.²⁰² His nephew, Thomas Christie, who

199. I have found no evidence whatever of popular hostility towards the rational dissenters in Scotland. In his study of popular disturbances between 1780 and 1815 K.J. Logue found "at least twenty one examples of popular resistance to the settlement of ministers." K.J. Logue, op cit, 2 and 168.

200. The Dictionary of National Biography, IV, 288.

201. Ironically William Christie appears to have been more of an autocrat than a democrat. When Skirving sent out invitations to the various societies to send delegates to the 3rd Convention, Christie replied stating that the members of the society had been lax in paying their subscriptions, and adding that "Finding their patriotic spirit so low, I thought it quite needless to call them together, or to propose electing a delegate on the present occasion. While they continue in their present languid frame, they are not worthy to be represented." William Christie to William Skirving, 24 October 1793. JC 26/280.

202. Meikle, op cit, 240.

had removed to London in the 1780s, was described in a report to the Home Office in November 1792, as "a correspondent of the disaffected in the County of Angus and particularly at Montrose,"²⁰³ but it was William Christie's good friend²⁰⁴ and fellow Unitarian preacher, Thomas Fyshe Palmer, who, of all the rational dissenters, played the most important part in organising the radical movement in Tayside. Palmer represented the Forfar society at the 1st Convention²⁰⁵ and was closely involved in Dundee radicalism,²⁰⁶ but he was also a leader of national importance. As a member of the Lawnmarket society in Edinburgh, whose meeting on 31 January 1793 he chaired,²⁰⁷ Palmer had a toe-hold in

203. Robert Graham to [H. Dundas?], 22 November 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) Supplementary. RH 2/4/207, ff 176-180. Thomas Christie was a member of the London Association of the Friends of the People and of the London Corresponding Society, which he joined during the summer of 1792. A Goodwin, op cit, 209.

204. When Palmer first came to Scotland he resided and preached in Montrose where William Christie had opened his meeting house. Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 378. Palmer's friendship with the Montrose Christie's continued into the 1790s. In 1790 Alexander Christie sent copies of his recently published works to Palmer, who replied that "no books ever were in such repute here. Your political one I have read twice, and could not help admiring... Your religious book, I am persuaded will do a great deal of good, notwithstanding its bulk." T.F. Palmer to Alexander Christie, 6 June 1790. NLS MSS 3703, f 116. See also Alexander Christie's reply to Palmer in which he states that the books have proved popular with the public. IBID, ff 118-119.

205. Meikle, op cit, 240.

206. On 22 November 1792, Robert Graham reported to the Home Office that the "ostensible promoter of all the levelling doctrines in the Town of Dundee is one Palmer... [known] by the name of the Unitarian Minister." Home Office Correspondence (Scotland). Supplementary RH2/4/207, ff 176-180.

207. J.B. to [R. Dundas?], 1 February 1793. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH 2/4/69, ff 288-293.

Edinburgh radical politics which he utilised to the full. He attended meetings of the Edinburgh General Committee, which between conventions exercised the function of the supreme policy making body within the Association of the Friends of the People, as a delegate of the Lawnmarket society, and attempted to persuade the Committee to adopt his ideas.²⁰⁸ Accurately described by William Scott, the Procurator Fiscal for Edinburgh, as one of the "leaders"²⁰⁹ of the Edinburgh General Committee, and thus of the Scottish radical movement as a whole, his activities both in Edinburgh and Dundee soon attracted the attention of the Lord Advocate who characterised him as "the most determined Rebel in Scotland."²¹⁰

In religious terms, the Scottish radical movement was an alliance of orthodox Calvinist and rationalist. In Montrose, it was reported in February 1793, the Rev. Frederick "McFarlane's society keeps very frequent meetings in the same house which William Christie kept for a preaching place."²¹¹ The situation in Montrose where Unitarian and Antiburgher worked hand-in-hand for the same political goal represented in extreme form what was happening across Scotland in the early 1790s.

208. He attended on 2 January 1793 and proposed that "the meeting should declare their sentiments agst a war or the impressing of Seamen" and publish their declaration in the Scots and English newspapers. William Scott to R. Dundas, 3 January 1793. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH 2/4/68, ff 13-16. He also attended, and chaired, another meeting of the Committee on 6 March 1793, where he argued that they should petition the House of Commons rather than the King against the war. J.B. to [R. Dundas?], 6 March 1793. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH 2/4/70, ff 37-43.

209. William Scott to R. Dundas, 3 January 1793, loc cit.

210. R. Dundas to [H. Dundas?], 2 August 1793. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland), RH 2/4/71, ff 381-383.

211. Mrs. Susan Bean to [H. Dundas?], 24 February 1793. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland), RH 2/4/69, ff 351-358.

This improbable alliance naturally produced tensions: both sides sought wide-ranging ecclesiastical reforms, but any discussion of this subject would tend to lead to dissension. Both sides could easily agree on the evils of church patronage and erastianism, but beyond this agreement on the nature of the new reformed church and its relationship with the state would prove impossible. Moreover, the fundamentally different religious outlooks of rationalists and Calvinists could create problems. When, on 22 November 1793, Andrew Newton, a tobacconist who had been delegated by the New Town of Edinburgh society, moved that the British Convention appoint a General Fast and Day of Humiliation,²¹² he stirred up a hornets' nest. His motion, while it was strongly supported by a goodly number of delegates including George Mealmaker, who delivered a long speech in the style of a "Tent Sermon,"²¹³ was proposed "amidst some laughter"²¹⁴ and provoked a storm of opposition not only from those who argued that it tended "to render the convention ridiculous, by enacting what they neither had right to enact, nor power to enforce" but also from those who stated that it 'tended to blend religion with politics [and] to divide the friends of reform."²¹⁵ The peace of the convention

212. Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 425.

213. J.B. to William Scott, 22 November 1793. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH 2/4/73, ff 220-225.

214. IBID.

215. Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 425. Among those who opposed Newton's motion was Alexander Aitchison, a medical student at the University of Edinburgh and a delegate from the Canongate No. 1 & 2 Society to the British Convention. Aitchison later wrote that "A.A. must confess he has long been somewhat heretical in Medicine [he never graduated], as well as in Religion and Politics - if the thinking or acting not from affectation of singularity, but from a thorough conviction of what appears to be truth is to be reckoned heresy. But while he declares.. that he firmly believes the whole sacred Scriptures, from the 1st of Genesis to the end of Revelations - tho' he does not pin his faith in the interpretation of them to the sleeve of any Man or body of Men, he hopes Dr. C[arlyle] will not rank him among the Atheists or even the Deists of France. And he may add, that he continues in the Communion of the Church of Scotland, as preferable in this respect to all the little bigotted Sects and parties who differ from her, and who lay down a set of fixed opinions as infallible, which none of their numbers must presume to call in question, under the penalty of excommunication." Alexander Aitchison to Dr. Alexander Carlyle, 2 August 1794. EUL. Carlyle Letters Dc4.41., f 141.

was only secured when Joseph Gerrald (1763-1796) and William Skirving intervened with a compromise motion that the "convention do earnestly recommend both to the members of this convention and to the friends of freedom and reform throughout Great Britain and Ireland to invoke the blessing of God... on the cause in which we are engaged."²¹⁶ The next day, James Gartley and William Ross, in an attempt to prevent such scenes recurring, proposed that the convention should not receive "any motion that may tend to a religious discussion."²¹⁷ This motion was only withdrawn when it was pointed out "that [as] the convention might reject any motion proposed they could avoid religious discussions, by throwing out such motions as might have that tendency."²¹⁸ By 1794 however the Edinburgh radicals had decided to make it one of the 'Fundamental Principles or Regulations of the Societies' that "No member shall introduce religious topics into debate, nor motion for prayers to be said, either at the beginning or dismission of the societies, because everything that tends to strife and diversion must be avoided."²¹⁹

216. Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 425-426.

217. IBID, 428. -

218. IBID, 453.

219. IBID, 1304. The situation in England was similar. Thomas Hardy, the secretary of the London Corresponding Society, informs us that there were men of all religions and none in the society. "Hence", he states, "it was found necessary to prohibit discussion of theological issues in the society in order to preserve harmony and good order." British Library, ADD. MSS 27814, f 30. This regulation failed to prevent religious discussion within the society, and the secession, in 1796, of a group of Methodist radicals outraged at the attitude and behaviour of some deists. See J. Walvin. "English Democratic Societies and Popular Radicalism, 1791-1800". York University, Ph.D. 1969, 482-485.

The unreformed political system was objected to not simply because it was corrupt, but because it tended to produce a legislature that was badly out of touch with and unsympathetic to public opinion. Increasingly, many came to regard Parliament as representative only of narrow, vested, interests whose views rarely coincided and were frequently at variance with those of the nation at large. Within the space of two years, between 1790 and 1792, Parliament demonstrated to the satisfaction of many, in its new Corn Law of 1791, and in its refusal to repeal the Test Act, countenance the demands of the burgh reformers, and abolish the slave trade, that it did not truly represent the nation. Gradually over this period more and more Scots came to believe that the only way to make Parliament responsive to public opinion was to open up the political process to the general public by means of a radical extension of the franchise. By 1792 Calvinists and rationalists were no longer thinking in terms of lobbying an unreformed House of Commons for the repeal of the Patronage and Test Acts respectively. Their objective had been by then transformed. Events had taught them that such reforms were seemingly unattainable under the old unreformed system and that only a more representative House of Commons would respond to the justice of their demands.

The campaign of the English dissenters, between 1787 and 1790, to secure the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts was viewed with much sympathy from Scotland. Not only rational dissenters, but seceders and even some Church of Scotland clergy regarded the acts as politically and morally intolerable. The Rev. Dr. Thomas Somerville, the independently minded Moderate minister of Jedburgh, regarded the Test Act as an impolitic measure "operating to the prejudice of a numerous and

respectable body of his majesty's subjects"²²⁰ and driving them into the camp of the political radicals. Archibald Bruce, the Antiburgher, took a less pragmatic and more principled line. He argued that, while the exclusion of Roman Catholics from civil and military offices was the correct line of policy, "the perpetual exclusion of Protestants of every denomination that may have invincible scruples about holding the communion the law requires, must be indefensible."²²¹ The Test and Corporation Acts were, he believed, "unworthy shackles... at variance with the primary law of protestantism." In his view the question was simplicity itself,

"To impose on the consciences of rulers [i.e. civil office holders] in matters of religion, not necessarily connected with the due discharge of the duties of their civil office, is equally unwarrantable as the imposing them on subjects as conditions of their allegiance. Both arise from the same erroneous system, and both tend to authorise persecution by law."²²²

Niel Douglas contrasted the "wise and liberal policy" of the French revolutionaries who made "all worthy citizens eligible to offices of civil power and trust in the executive as well as in the legislative part of government", with that of the British legislature which

220. I. Somerville. "Observations on the Constitution and Present State of Britain". (Edinburgh, 1793), 15 and 39-43. The Rev. Stevenson Macgill (1765-1840), of Eastwood parish, also favoured the repeal of the Test Act. R. Burns. "Memoir of the Rev. Stevenson Macgill, D.D., Professor of Theology in the University of Glasgow, and Dean of the Chapel Royal" (Edinburgh, 1842), 27.

221. A. Bruce. "A Historico-Politico-Ecclesiastical Dissertation on the Supremacy of Civil Powers in Matters of Religion; Particularly the Ecclesiastical Supremacy Annexed to the English Crown". (Edinburgh, 1802), 54.

222. IBID, 54.

"continues still in force... a partial and sometimes oppressive act, which excludes many of the most worthy citizens, and most loyal subjects, from serving their king."²²³ The Test and Corporation Acts, he pointed out, "may exclude honest, conscientious men, who cannot trifle with God, and their consciences, for the sake of worldly gain, from serving their Country in offices of power and trust; but cannot exclude rogues, who can swallow every test than can be framed."²²⁴ Douglas lumped together the Test and Patronage Acts, and denounced them jointly as "those engines of oppression, partiality and persecution."²²⁵ In this he found further common ground with Bruce and the Antiburghers, to whom the Test Act was but a part of a system of ecclesiastico-political tyranny, sometimes designated as Toryism, which stood in diametrical opposition to the principles of presbyterianism.²²⁶

The failure of the English dissenters to persuade Parliament to repeal the Test Act did not directly affect Scottish dissenters (unless they sought civil or military office in England) because the Test Act did not apply in Scotland. Provided Scottish dissenters took the oaths of abjuration and of fidelity to the king they were not affected politically by their religious status. Nevertheless, Parliament's action, in rejecting what were widely regarded as the reasonable demands of the English dissenters, was viewed in Scotland as evidence of the stranglehold exercised by the combined forces of Tory intolerance and Church of England bigotry over the British House of Commons.

223. Britannicus, "A Monitory Address," 186-187.

224. N. Douglas. "Britain's Guilt, Danger and Duty; Several Sermons, preached at Anderston, near Glasgow; Aug. 23, 1795. With large notes, and an appendix." (Dundee, 1795), 198.

225. N. Douglas, "Thoughts on Modern Politics," 120.

226. A Bruce, "A Historico-Politico-Ecclesiastical Dissertation," 103-107.

If the rejection of the English dissenters' demands in 1790 produced resentment in Scotland, that resentment was immeasurably increased when, in 1791, the House of Commons threw out the application of the Church of Scotland to have that part of the Test Act which applied to its communicants repealed. If in theory, however, the Test Act discriminated against members of the Church of Scotland by making it impossible for them to hold civil or military office in England without first receiving communion according to the rites of the Church of England, in practice it was seldom, if ever, enforced. When, therefore, in 1790 an application to Parliament for relief from this 'theoretical' grievance was initiated, the Scottish landed classes found no reason to concur in the application. Consequently the application emanated from the clergy alone. It was initiated by an overture from the Presbytery of Jedburgh which came before the General Assembly in May 1790. There, despite the opposition of some leading Moderates,²²⁷ it was agreed that the act constituted a grievance and a committee appointed to press for redress. The motives which lay behind this decision were at least twofold. Firstly, to place

227. Dr. Joseph McCormick (1733-1799), of St. Leonard's parish, St. Andrews, wrote to Dr. Alexander Carlyle (1722-1805) of Inveresk parish, a fellow leader of the Moderate Party, 11 May 1790, "The Test Business will give you but little trouble, perhaps the best Mode of knocking it in the head would be for you to bring in an overture for freeing the English Dissenters from Subscription of the 39 Articles in order to their enjoying Church livings. This is what Burke called the Argumentum ad Absurdum." EUL. Carlyle Letters Dc4.41, f 71. Principal George Hill (1750-1819), the principal figure in the Moderate Party's collective leadership, opposed the Presbytery of Jedburgh's overture in a speech before the General Assembly, the content of which anticipated that given by his political ally Henry Dundas in the House of Commons almost one year later. He argued that "Scotchmen had not been excluded even from the highest offices; that the law was never carried into effect; and that, under all these circumstances, it would be imprudent to labour for the repeal of a statute, incorporated with a treaty [the Treaty of Union], which had secured the existence and privileges of the Church of Scotland." G. Cook. "The Life of the Late George Hill, D.D., Principal of St. Mary's College, St. Andrews." (Edinburgh, 1820), 275-276.

the established churches of England and Scotland on an equal footing by removing what the Rev. Robert Small of Dundee called "our humiliating subjection to the Tests of a foreign church,"²²⁸ and, secondly, to prevent the future withdrawal of "many of our nobility and gentry" from the Church of Scotland.²²⁹ Moreover, it is possible that with some at least, a third motive was involved: to assist the English dissenters in their campaign by weakening the operation of the Test Act. Such a construction may be placed upon the meeting of the Rev. Dr. Thomas Somerville, the father of the Scottish campaign, who was in London to help forward the business before Parliament, and the Rev. Theophilus Lindsey (1723-1808), a noted Unitarian and campaigner for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts.²³⁰

The Church of Scotland's case was taken up by the opposition Whigs, who had also supported the English dissenters in their efforts to secure the repeal of the act, and was presented to Parliament by the conservative figure of Sir Gilbert Elliot of Minto.²³¹ The debate in Parliament, on 10 May 1791, took on a party complexion with Elliot,

228. R. Small to A. Carlyle, 9 December 1791. EUL. Carlyle Letters. Dc4.41, f130. See also, Lt. Col. Norman Macleod's speech in the House of Commons, 10 May 1791, in which he argued that "to oblige a member of the Church of Scotland to profess an attachment to the religion of England, instead of his own country, was... a mark of subjection, an invidious distinction that ought not to exist." Parl. Hist. XXIX, 510.

229. An article entitled "On the Test Act" written by 'Candidus' and published in the 'Bee', 10 May 1791, it was stated that "we cannot but lament the melancholy operation of this grievance, in withdrawing from our kirk many of our nobility and gentry." The Bee, or Literary Weekly Intelligencer, III, 60. The Test Act, it was feared, tended to act among the political nation as a recruiting agent for Episcopalianism.

230. H. McLachlan. "Letters of Theophilus Lindsey" (Manchester University Press, 1920), 68. Lindsey noted, on 7 May 1791, after meeting Somerville, that Somerville "does not think they shall succeed." IBID, 68.

231. Parl. Hist. XXIX, 491.

Anstruther, Macleod and Fox supporting the General Assembly's petition and William Pitt, Robert Dundas and Henry Dundas vigorously opposing it.²³² The Government had the support of leading Moderate clergymen, and Robert Dundas was furnished with arguments by Professor George Hill (1750-1819),²³³ the leader of the Moderate Party. The Lord Advocate, who was making his maiden speech, pointed out that the act did not prevent Scots from being admitted to their full share of offices and that no complaint against the act had been received from those whom it was alleged to discriminate against.²³⁴ Both Henry Dundas and William Pitt, however, linked their opposition to a fear that the proposed measure would tend, if successful, to weaken the security of the Test Act in England and, therefore, by implication, the position of the Church of England. As echoes of the old cry 'The church in danger', which had resounded only one year previously, were heard once again in St. Stephen's chapel, Pitt declared that he "considered the motion as nearly connected with the general repeal of the test act", adding that "unless a clearer distinction could be made out than any yet stated, he must look

232. IBID, 490-510. It should be noted that it was not the intention of the committee of the General Assembly to make the issue a party one. The committee applied to both Prime Minister Pitt and Lord Advocate Dundas for their assistance in forwarding the business. IBID, 490.

233. George Hill to Robert Dundas, 14 March 1791. "I have taken the liberty of throwing together in the enclosed paper the reasons which may be urged for opposing the business which your Lordship mentions, at its first appearance." In the enclosure Hill stated that "no complaint of any grievance sustained by the operation of the Test Act comes from the people of Scotland," that the General Assembly of 1790 did not expect their committee to petition Parliament, and that the committee consisted of only 20 persons of whom 11 voted in favour of petitioning. EUL. Laing MSS Division II. No. 500.

234. Parl. Hist. XXIX, 496.

upon the one as a preliminary to the other."²³⁵ Elliot's motion was defeated by 149 votes to 62.²³⁶

Although the landed classes showed a marked lack of interest in the General Assembly's application, it would be an error to suppose that the nation as a whole were similarly indifferent. The Test Act may have been a 'theoretical' grievance with no direct relevance to the vast bulk of the Scottish people who did not aspire to hold the sort of offices covered by the act, but the act was nevertheless regarded as a symbolic affront to both national and presbyterian susceptibilities. Moreover, the rejection of Elliot's motion was seen as adding insult to injury. When the General Assembly met shortly after the unsuccessful application to Parliament a lawyer elder pointed out that while the operation of the Test Act did not affect Scots "It was the most extraordinary occurrence in the annals of history for government to refuse the prayers of a whole nation."²³⁷ Robert Small, the Moderator, commented on "the ruffled minds of the kingdom" and feared that it was now "in the power of the popular leaders, by the least exertion, to raise a tumult equal to any in Charles the First's days."²³⁸ By the end of 1791 these fears

235. IBID, 508. Ultra-conservatives like Lord Fife linked the application of the Church of Scotland's committee in 1791 with that of the English Dissenters one year earlier and equated both with a dangerous political radicalism analogous to that operating in France. Fife wrote to his factor, William Rose, 14 May 1791, "You will see from the papers that there are people that wish to throw this country and all into confusion. I hope they will never have power equal to their inclination and I heartily wish that they were all with the French national assembly, that the country was rid of them... I am glad so great a majority in the Commons was against the repeal of the Test Act. We have gone on wonderfully well, and all these reformers intend no good." A. & H. Laylor, op cit, 226-227.

236. Parl. Hist. XXIX, 510.

237. H. McLachlan, op cit, 69.

238. IBID, 69.

had evaporated, but he could still write of his "serious anger" at Parliament's decision; a decision that gave the Church of England "a distinction and superiority which her bigotry and narrowness of spirit by no means deserves."²³⁹ Small's anger was widely shared and his fears were, to some extent, justified. When the author of a handbill called upon the citizens of Edinburgh to celebrate the King's birthday in 1792 by burning an effigy of Henry Dundas, he described Dundas as "that Lash of his Country [who] under the cloak of Patriotism secretly at least seeks her ruin" and asked his readership to "Think on his opposition to the abolishment of the Test Act, by which our Church is drained."²⁴⁰ William Skirving's first entry into the political arena was as a member of a shadowy organisation based in Edinburgh entitled the 'Association for the abolition of Patronage and a repeal of the Test and Corporation Statutes'. The Association aimed to publish an address to the parishes of Scotland inviting them to form similar associations and to join in petitioning Parliament for a repeal of the obnoxious statutes. Their intention was that "every communicant" should have an equal say in the election of his own minister and that

"every citizen provided he discharges the duties of the civil state, should not be incapacitated from obtaining its honours, acquiring its emoluments, or arriving at usefulness which is preferable to both, merely because in his Conscience, he either cannot subscribe to a particular system of religious opinions, or permit himself to convert

239. R. Small to A. Carlyle, 9 December 1791. EUL. Carlyle Letters Dc4.41, f130.

240. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland). RH 2/4/63, f171. This poster was found on Public Notice Boards in Edinburgh. Declaration of James Stirling. IBID, f169.

the awful ordinance of the Lord's Supper, into a passport to place and to interest."²⁴¹

The programme of the Edinburgh Association anticipated that of the Scottish Friends of the People. A draft 'Address to the Public from the Friends of the People', which may be dated to the period July-December 1793, complained of "The shameful public contempt thrown on presbyterian principles by obliging persons, though of the established religion in Scotland, to renounce the religion of their country, and to conform to the Church of England."²⁴² The radicals' aim was not however simply to ameliorate the Test Act, as envisaged by the Church of Scotland's committee in 1791, but rather to repeal it along with all other penal statutes against religious groups and establish a universal liberty of conscience. The draft address, which may have originated in a motion at the 3rd Convention that "this convention draw up a few leading features of our grievances, such as corporation laws, test acts, patronage, etc., which are all inimical to the natural rights and liberties of man",²⁴³ also complained of "The iniquitous and ungenerous penal statutes against dissenters from both churches".²⁴⁴ Moreover, when a "number of the inhabitants of the village of Anderstown"(Anderston, now part of Glasgow) formed themselves into a society of "The Friends of the Constitution and of the People", on 17 November 1792, they resolved,

241. Undated paper entitled "Association for the abolition of Patronage and a repeal of the Test and Corporation Statutes" found amongst Skirving's papers in JC 26/280.

242. The undated address is to be found in JC 26/280.

243. Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 397.

244. JC 26/280.

"That religion, or matters of conscience, being a private contract between man and his Maker, all attempts at a uniformity of opinion by religious tests and establishments, are as opposite to the mild and benevolent doctrines taught by the heavenly founder of the Christian Religion while upon earth, as experience has proved them to be absurd, oppressive, and impracticable."²⁴⁵

The Anderston society's commitment to ecclesiastical disestablishment must have raised a few eyebrows within the movement, but its attitude towards the Test Act was representative of general opinion among the radicals.

If Parliament's refusal to repeal or amend the Test Act antagonised many in Scotland, it did not rouse them to fury or galvanise them into creating a movement for parliamentary reform. The poster calling on the people of Edinburgh to burn Dundas' effigy belongs to June 1792 not to June 1791, and Skirving's association aimed at lobbying not reforming Parliament. If the Test Act controversy fostered the suspicion that Parliament was insensitive to popular demands, and that the interests and views of the landed classes, which were predominantly represented in Parliament, did not coincide with those of the nation at large, it required other issues to transform suspicion into hard belief.

At the same time as the Test Act issue was coming before the church courts a new Corn Law was going through Parliament. The Corn Law of 1791 was not a novelty: corn laws designed to serve the landed interest by maintaining a protected home market in grain and by paying bounties on its export had long been a feature of government policy. Similarly, opposition to such laws was nothing new. The magistrates

245. The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer, 23-26 November 1792.

and council of Glasgow resolved on 1 November 1786 "to oppose any bill that may be brought into parliament by which the prices of grain and meal may be steadily raised" and to support "a free importation and exportation of these necessities of life."²⁴⁶ The new Corn Law of 1791, which unlike previous temporary measures was intended as a long term solution to the problem of feeding Britain,²⁴⁷ aroused fierce opposition from mercantile and industrial interest groups, particularly in the west of Scotland. On 19 January 1791 the magistrates and council of Glasgow reaffirmed their commitment to "a free importation and exportation of corn" and claimed "that bounties for exportation and duties on importation of corn are impolitic and prejudicial to all ranks... in the present advanced state of its [i.e. Britain's] commerce and manufactures, which renders an importation of corn and meal necessary in all seasons".²⁴⁸ Their stance had the support of the Merchants House, Chamber of Commerce, Trades House, and various individual Trade Incorporations, for the simple reason that the bourgeoisie of Glasgow, and, it might be added, of other burghs, saw that it was in their own interests to pursue a cheap food policy. If the price of oat-meal, which constituted the staple item in the average Scotsman's diet, could be reduced, then (so the theory ran) wage rates would tend to fall, the price of manufactured goods would decline producing an increase in demand, and profits would rise.²⁴⁹

246. R. Renwick, ed. "Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Glasgow with charters and other documents". VIII, (Glasgow, 1908), 209.

247. The Bee, or Literary Weekly Intelligencer, I, 304.

248. R. Renwick, op cit, 400-401.

249. The converse of this argument was that Corn Laws tended to keep up the price of oat-meal, to raise wage-rates, reduce demand and squeeze profits. The Glasgow Incorporation of Skinners were not alone in fearing that the Corn Bill of 1791 "might be attended with most injurious consequences to the rising progress of manufactures". The Edinburgh Evening Courant, 24 March 1791.

Much of the criticism levelled at the Corn Bill of 1791 concerned not so much its principles as its details. This probably was owing to the realisation that while Parliament was unwilling radically to alter its agrarian policies it would be willing to reconsider their administrative details. Thus, the final Corn Law, which came into force on 15 November 1791, took some account of informed criticism by increasing the number and altering the shape of the administrative districts into which, for the purposes of the act, Scotland was divided.²⁵⁰ Such amendments answered some criticisms, but fundamentally the bill remained an administrative nonsense. The Rev. Robert Small of Dundee commented, 12 November 1792, that

"during the last spring, seed corn, even from England,
though often of the utmost importance to this country, and

250. The original proposal was for three districts comprising, firstly, the counties of Fife, Kinross, Clackmannan, Stirling, West Lothian, Midlothian, East Lothian, Berwick, Roxburgh, Selkirk, Peebles and Dumfries, and the Stewarty of Kirkcudbright, secondly, the counties of Argyll, Dumbarton, Lanark, Renfrew, Bute, Ayr and Wigton, and, thirdly, the counties of Orkney, Shetland, Caithness, Sutherland, Ross, Inverness, Cromarty, Nairn, Elgin, Banff, Aberdeen, Kincardine, Forfar and Perth. The Scots Magazine, LIII, 42. It was subsequently pointed out that such a division made little economic sense however neat it might appear on the map. Fertile and infertile counties were grouped together in a nonsensical way, and Glasgow in particular protested vigorously against the inclusion of the agricultural counties of Ayr and Wigton in her district. The Caledonian Mercury, 31 March 1791. Glasgow's complaints were listened to. The final act divided Scotland into four divisions, viz. 1. The counties of Fife, Kinross, Clackmannan, Stirling, West Lothian, Midlothian, East Lothian, Berwick, Roxburgh, Selkirk and Peebles. 2. The counties of Dumfries, Wigton, and Ayr, and the Stewarty of Kirkcudbright. 3. The counties of Argyll, Dumbarton, Lanark, Renfrew and Bute, and the western-ports and isles of Inverness-shire and Ross-shire. 4. Mainland Ross-shire and Inverness-shire, the counties of Orkney, Shetland, Caithness, Sutherland, Cromarty, Nairn, Elgin, Banff, Aberdeen, Kincardine, Forfar and Perth. 'Abstract of the Corn Bill' published in The Bee, or Literary Weekly Intelligencer, VI, 24-25.

"various articles of household provision, which the country does not yet supply, were by its [i.e. the Corn Law's] operation, laid under an absolute prohibition, or a duty which, with equal efficacy, prevented importation. The intercourse for corn was not at that time permitted, even with the county of Fife, from which we are separated only by the river; and at the present time... though the harvest has been bad, and the price of grain considerably raised, two vessels with grain and meal, one of which lies in the harbour and the other is daily expected, will not be permitted to unload their cargoes."²⁵¹

Such provisions fully justified the criticisms of Dr. James Anderson (1739-1808), an agricultural economist and the editor of the 'Bee', who had argued that the Corn Laws should be operated according to national rather than regional price levels, that they should "give the fullest scope to the internal traffic in grain through the country" and that "every restraint [should] be removed from the shipping and transporting of corn coast-wise on all occasions."²⁵² With good reason, Anderson commented, on 1 February 1792, that "seldom, perhaps, has any bill passed into a law, which reflects less honour on those who prepared and brought it forward."²⁵³

The Corn Law of 1791 provoked however not only the criticisms of agricultural economists, parish ministers, and a bourgeoisie upset at the prospect of paying higher wages, but also the indignation of a 'menu peuple' outraged by an iniquitous law which adversely affected their

251. OSA, VIII, 245.

252. The Bee, or Literary Weekly Intelligencer, II, 53-57. The article, entitled 'On the Corn Laws', was published on 16 March 1791.

253. IBID, VII, 187.

standard of living and threatened them with real distress. In November 1792 it was reported that "the corn bill.. gives great umbrage in most places in this country as they say one part of the country may starve as it cannot be supplied from the other",²⁵⁴ and in Dundee in particular "great umbrage" was indeed taken. There, the circumstances described above by Small helped to produce a serious riot, which, in its mingling of traditional methods of popular protest with radical political slogans and symbols, illustrated how receptive a disgruntled 'menu peuple' had become to radical ideas.²⁵⁵ The radicals both reflected and exploited popular opposition to the Corn Laws.²⁵⁶ To the radicals and to the

254. Mrs. Susan Bean to [H. Dundas?], 24 November 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH 2/4/64, ff 33-34. See also an anonymous memorandum on the Dundee riots of November 1792 in which it is stated that "The Corn Laws are unpopular, the people say one part of the country may be starved, before they can be assisted from another." Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) Supplementary RH 2/4/209, ff 12-13.

255. This will be discussed in Chapter 3.

256. For example, a meeting was held in Glasgow on 21 March 1791 to protest against certain proposals in the new Corn Bill. The meeting, whose proceedings were chaired by James Richardson, the president of the Glasgow Burgh Reform Association and an original member of the London Association of the Friends of the People, and recorded by George Crawford, a future secretary of the Glasgow Association of the Friends of the People and a delegate to the 1st Convention, noted that the Lord Provost had declined calling a meeting of the inhabitants and had stated that "the inhabitants are represented by the Town Council, the Merchants House, and the Trades House". The meeting then resolved that "these three corporations do not represent the inhabitants as the Provost alleges, and as was lately contended before Parliament". It was further resolved that "the inhabitants at large ought to be consulted on every public measure before Parliament by which they may be affected; and that the Magistrates petitioning Parliament on business affecting the rights and interests of the citizens, without previously consulting them is unconstitutional and an infringement of their privileges." The Caledonian Mercury, 31 March 1791.

people whom they claimed to represent the Corn Laws were a grievance,²⁵⁷ which, in the words of a committee of the London Corresponding Society, resulted "from the restriction of the choice of representatives to men of landed property."²⁵⁸ An anonymous memorandum on "Provisions", drawn up in late 1792 or early 1793 for the use of the government in Scotland, "observed... that more than one Jacobine publication has already taken notice of the Corn Laws, [and] the Bounty has been called 'A Premium for starving the Poor'".²⁵⁹ The author expected that this line of argument would be "urged with more violence" in future and argued that "the suppression of the Bounty deserves consideration."²⁶⁰ Clearly, conservatives were aware that the Corn Laws represented their Achilles heel: a heel prominently visible to the bulk of the urban population and exposed to the arrows of radical propaganda. The Corn Laws were to remain the Achilles heel of Toryism until the disastrous potato famine of the 1840s forced Sir Robert Peel to abolish them in 1846.

The Corn Law of 1791 was widely recognised by bourgeois and artisans alike not only as eloquent testimony to the predominant influence of the landed interest in the House of Commons but also as evidence of the economic illiteracy of the unreformed legislature. It was believed that because the unreformed House of Commons did not adequately represent industrial and commercial interests policies were pursued that seriously hindered the development of both. In particular, it was argued,

257. The Corn Laws were included in a list of grievances drawn up by one of the divisions at the British Convention, JC 26/280.

258. Howell, State Trials, XXIV, 576.

259. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) Supplementary. RH 2/4/209, f34.

260. IBID.

Parliament raised penal taxes from industry rather than reduce its expenditure or increase the taxes on landed property.

Complaints about the discriminatory and destructive taxation policies of 'Old Corruption' became particularly vociferous during the troubled summer of 1791 and were given prominence in the reform-minded periodical the 'Bee'. An essay entitled 'Political Quèries', written by one 'Jonathan Jerk' (sic), and published in July 1791, listed the various industries which, it claimed, had either been brought to the verge of ruin or had been prevented from establishing themselves by the operation of the excise laws.²⁶¹ 'Jerk' concluded that

"we have hardly a manufacture in this country which has not, at one time or other, been reduced to the brink of ruin within these few years, by the severe oppression of revenue laws. It is true that both parts of the united kingdom are making rapid advances in wealth and population; but this is not the consequence of good, but in spite of bad, government. We are no more to thank Mr. Pitt for the general improvement of the country than we are to blame him for the present cold summer weather."²⁶²

One month later the 'Bee' published an article entitled 'Hints respecting the New Prison' which, with bitter wit, suggested that the proposed new prison in Edinburgh include a large cell-block to be called 'The excise Ward' to receive those who could not pay their excise duties.²⁶³ The author, 'An Inhabitant of Edinburgh', added that

261. The Bee, or Literary Weekly Intelligencer, IV, 91-92.

262. IBID, 92.

263. IBID, 257.

"as it seems to be the system at present to extend the Excise laws farther and farther, which will of course bring more numerous inhabitants to this ward, it will be proper, at this time, to pay attention to this circumstance, that before it be too late the bounds appropriated to this ward may not be too small."²⁶⁴

These criticisms were echoed in a series of letters entitled 'On the Political Progress of Britain' which first appeared in the 'Bee' between February and June 1792 and were subsequently republished in pamphlet form in September of the same year.²⁶⁵ The author, James Thomson Callender, who wrote under the pseudonym of 'Timothy Thunderproof', lashed the unreformed system with unremitting severity. He described Scotland as a conquered province of England and claimed that Scottish M.Ps., (who were well aware of the "total insignificance of their situation"), behaved accordingly as the servile tools of English misgovernment.²⁶⁶ "An equal number of elbow chairs", he claimed, "placed once for all on the ministerial benches would be less expensive

264. IBID, 257.

265. "The Political Progress of Britain; or an impartial account of the principal abuses in the Government of this country, from the Revolution in 1688. The whole tending to prove the ruinous consequences of the popular System of War and Conquest, 'The World's Mad Business'." Part First (Edinburgh, 1792). The pamphlet, of which the second part never appeared, was published anonymously.

266. "The people of Scotland are, on all occasions, foolish enough to interest themselves in the good or bad fortune of an English minister; though it does not appear that we have more influence with such a minister, than with the cabinet of Japan. To England we were for many centuries a hostile, and we are still considered by them as a foreign, and in effect a conquered nation. It is true, that we elect very near a twelfth part of the British House of Commons; but our representatives have no title to vote, or act in a separate body. Every statute proceeds upon the majority of the voices of the whole compound assembly. What, therefore, can forty five persons accomplish, when opposed by five hundred and thirteen? They feel the total insignificance of their situation and behave accordingly." IBID, 9.

to government, and just about as manageable."²⁶⁷ To this radical nationalist, industrial taxation policy was governed by a desire on the part of "our southern masters" to destroy Scottish industry. By "a scandalous breach of faith", he argued, the distilleries had been almost destroyed, the manufacture of starch had been driven to the verge of extinction, and the manufacturers of paper, printed calicoes, malt liquors and glass had been harassed by vexatious methods of exacting the revenue.²⁶⁸ "It seems," he stated,

"to have been long a maxim of the monopolising directors, of our southern masters, to extirpate as fast as possible every manufacture in this country that interferes with their own.. Let us look around this insulted country, and say, on what manufacture except the linen, government has not fastened its bloody fangs."²⁶⁹

Moreover, he argued, the progress of industry had also been seriously and adversely affected by the barbarous²⁷⁰ imperialist policies of the English government. Wars of foreign conquest had brought no benefit to the people of Britain, but had been pursued in order to provide 'Old Corruption' with patronage to keep the House of Commons in

267. IBID, 10. He added that "Our members are, most of them, the mere satellites of the minister of the day; and forward to serve his most oppressive and criminal purposes." IBID, 10.

268. IBID, 10-11.

269. IBID, 11.

270. "What quarter of the globe", he asked, "has not been convulsed by our ambition, our avarice, and our baseness? The tribes of the Pacific ocean are polluted by the most loathsome of diseases; our brandy has brutalised or extirpated the Indians of the western continent... On the shores of Africa, we bribe whole nations by drunkenness, to robbery and murder, while in the face of earth and heaven, our senators assemble to sanctify the practice." IBID, 13.

thralldom.²⁷¹ "What 'our excellent constitution' may be in theory", he thundered, "I neither know nor care. In practice, it is altogether a conspiracy of the rich against the poor."²⁷²

Callender's nationalist views²⁷³ were not apparently shared by Hugh Bell, a wealthy brewer, burgess of Edinburgh, prominent burgh reformer, and a colleague of Callender's as delegate to the 1st Convention of the Friends of the People,²⁷⁴ but his views on imperialism²⁷⁵ and industrial taxation were. Bell's "Impartial Account of the Conduct of the Excise", which was published in the summer of 1791, complained that if the excise laws were "excessively severe" then "this severity is

271. "The patronage of Gibraltar may be conjectured to purchase ten votes in the market of St. Stephen's chapel." Had wars of foreign conquest, he argued, been forsaken for domestic improvement "the productions of the soil, and the number of inhabitants, might have exceeded, by tenfold, their present amount. Public roads, canals, bridges, and buildings of every description, must have multiplied far beyond what our most sanguine wishes are capable of conceiving." IBID, 26 and 28.

272. IBID, 23. Callender could be as forceful a writer as Paine. "There is a cant expression in this country", he wrote, "that our Government is deservedly the wonder and envy of the world. With better reason it may be said that parliament is a mere outwork of the court, a phalanx of mercenaries embattled against the reason, the happiness, and the liberty of mankind. The game laws, the dog act, the shop tax, the window tax, the pedlar tax, the attorney tax, and a thousand others, give us a right to wish that their authors had been hanged." IBID, 19-20.

273. It may be noted that Callender's fellow nationalist Thomas Muir hoped to meet up with Callender in the USA in 1796. It is possible that they were friends. Thomas Muir to [John Millar, jun] Monterrey, (Mexico), 15 July 1796. Transcriptions from the Originals in the Archives of the Indies at Seville, Spain. NLS MSS 3825. Letter 1.

274. Bell owned "an extensive brewery in the Pleasance [Edinburgh]." The Edinburgh Evening Courant, 24 November 1794. He described himself as a "Brewer, Burgess and Guild Brother of Edinburgh". H. Bell. "Observations upon Scotch Fisheries, Emigrations, and the Means of Improving the Highlands and Isles." (Edinburgh, 1792), titlepage. He was added to the Standing Committee of the Burgh Reformers in August 1789. The Caledonian Mercury, 24 August 1789. He served as a delegate to the 1st Convention of the Friends of the People. Meikle, op cit, 239.

275. "The empires", he wrote, "of Alexander, of Rome, of Mahomet, of Charlemagne, of Philip, of Lewes, and of George, all prove how destructive or how vain are attempts to overgrown monarchies". Empire building, he claimed, had nothing to do with commercial vision and everything to do with military ambition. H. Bell. "Observations upon the Character of Alexander the Great, as given by the Learned and Rev. Dr. Robertson". (Edinburgh, 1792), 5 and 8-20.

nothing to the illegal and partial oppression exercised by the subordinate agents of excise."²⁷⁶ The administration of the excise was, he claimed, characterised by corruption and oppression, and the consequence was "the diminution of the revenue, the destruction of individuals, and the ruining of a most useful branch of manufacture."²⁷⁷ This corruption, which he graphically related,²⁷⁸ had already ruined the soap, starch and distilling industries in Scotland, and bade fair to ruin the breweries.²⁷⁹ Already, Bell complained, "vast quantities" of malt liquor were imported from England because the Scottish brewers were handicapped by "the oppression of excisemen."²⁸⁰ To a significant number of these oppressed brewers the answer to their problems lay in parliamentary reform. Of the Edinburgh brewers who met together in 1788 to concert measures for reforming the excise service at least four and possibly as many as six were later to become delegates to one or more of the conventions of the Friends of the People.²⁸¹

276. H. Bell. "An Impartial Account of the Conduct of the Excise towards the Breweries in Scotland, particularly in Edinburgh". (Edinburgh, 1791), X.

277. IBID, XI.

278. See particularly pp 19-39.

279. IBID, VIII-IX.

280. IBID, VI-VII. He claimed that Scotland imported £200,000 worth of English malt liquor each year, and that Edinburgh alone imported £40,000 worth. IBID, 22.

281. Bell himself attended the 1st Convention, see fn.274. Peter Hardie was delegated by the Portsburgh Society to the 1st, 3rd and British Conventions. Meikle, op cit, 240. Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 392. Charles Salter was delegated by the Cowgate Society to the 2nd, 3rd and British Conventions. Meikle, op cit. 275. Howell State Trials XXIII, 391. Isaac Salter was delegated to the 2nd and 3rd Conventions by the Cowgate Society. IBID. Moreover, it is possible that Richard Younger, who was delegated by the Canongate No.1 & 2 Society to the 3rd and British Conventions, and a certain "Cleghorn", who was delegated by the Original Association of Edinburgh to the 1st Convention, may be identified with Richard Younger and David Cleghorn who attended the brewers' meeting in 1788. Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 392 and Meikle, op cit, 241. The list of those who attended the brewers' meeting in 1788 may be found in H. Bell, "An Impartial Account of the Excise", 81.

To disgruntled businessmen like Bell burgh reform, while desirable in itself, was incapable of solving many of their most pressing problems. Burgh councils did not determine taxation policy or control the activities of the excise service. A draft 'Address to the Public from the Friends of the People' summarised the economic problems of the 'industrious classes'. It complained of the "arbitrary acts of Town Councils, usurping a legislative power, and enacting oppressive taxes to support extravagance", but it also railed against "various arbitrary acts of Parliament affecting trade and prosperity" and the ruin of numerous industries "through partial favour, or the unavoidable ignorance of the members respecting these branches, and the local circumstances respecting them".²⁸² Only parliamentary reform, it was believed, would, by increasing the political weight of the industrial and commercial interests and reducing that of the landed, produce a House of Commons knowledgeable of and sympathetic to the needs of the 'industrious classes'. A 'Review of the Constitution and Government', dated 29 October 1793, and presented to the 3rd Convention of the Friends of the People²⁸³, stated that

"The advocates of our Constitution call the House of Commons the security of the Commercial Interest. To prove the Commercial Interest... to be extremely trifling we have only to count the members sent thither by our Commercial nation. In Scotland... these are reduced to the paltry number of

282. "Address to the Public from the Friends of the People", JC 26/280.

283. The 'Review' was remitted by the Convention, on 4 November 1793, "for want of time, to the consideration of the Edinburgh Monthly Committee". Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 413.

fifteen, while the landed interest or freeholders put
in double the number".²⁸⁴

Thus, the 'Review' argued, the House of Commons had become "the support of the landed interest while the interest of commerce is totally neglected", and consequently, it added, the tax burden had been unfairly loaded on commerce while land had escaped relatively lightly.²⁸⁵

Bourgeois and artisan alike felt themselves oppressed by an unfair tax burden and by the corrupt practices of the excise service. The exciseman was a hated figure in eighteenth century Scotland: to many he seemed to personify oppression, corruption and insolence. In June 1792 a circular letter called upon "all the Tradesmen in Edinburgh" to assist in giving "a general salute in the way it was given to Capt. Porteous of the Town Guard, to Mr. Maitland General Supervisor of the Excise who has been a Scourge to this Country for some years past, and unjust and dishonest in the Execution of his Office to the blackest degree". Maitland, the circular claimed, had "made himself rich by receiving Bribes from wealthy people and... seizing from the Poor who were not able to Bribe him".²⁸⁶ In November 1792 it was reported to Government that the excise regulations were felt to be so oppressive that "the poor, the farmer, the tradesman & almost every class join in cursing the K _ g and the Exciseman". The correspondent added, by way of illustration, that "If a few of them go to the public house to drink and complain the Ale is weak, they are told the Gaugers oppress them, so

284. "Review of the Constitution and Government of Great Britain", p 61. JC 26/276.

285. IBID, pp 62-63.

286. Letter addressed 'To all the Tradesmen in Edinburgh and all others who wish well to their country'. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH 2/4/63, ff 193-194.

they cannot make it stronger."²⁸⁷ In the same month as this was being reported from Kirriemuir a serious riot broke out in Dundee, where the houses of the hated excisemen were attacked and handbills posted up proclaiming 'No king, no Gauger, Liberty'.²⁸⁸ In the same month also a similar riot occurred in Auchtermuchty, where, the Sheriff of Fife reported, a Tree of Liberty had been erected, the church-bells rung and the excise officer threatened.²⁸⁹ Thus, by the later part of 1792 the age-old²⁹⁰ popular opposition to high taxation in general and the excise service in particular had become politicised²⁹¹. The exciseman was no longer simply the object of popular vituperation or assault: he was the personification of 'Old Corruption', the symbolic representative of a hateful political system.

Parliamentary reform, both bourgeois and artisan radical believed, would lead to a lessening of the overall tax burden and a restructuring of the taxation system that would free the 'industrious

287. James Mitchell to [H. Dundas?], 29 November 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH 2/4/68, ff 158-159.

288. James Mitchell to Adam Pearson, 23 November 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) Supplementary RH 2/4/207, ff 409-411.

289. Claud Boswell to R. Dundas, 9 December 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH 2/4/66, f 260.

290. E. Henderson records, for example, that in 1757 "there were [sic] much discontent and grumbling about the laying on of a window Tax". "The Annals of Dunfermline and Vicinity from the earliest authentic period to the present time AD 1069-1878" (Glasgow, 1879), 470.

291. The same process of politicisation was taking place in England. The 'Report of the Committee of Constitution of the London Corresponding Society' stated, "Excise laws - and stamp duties (and the consequent system of spies and informers) equally repugnant to the professed principles of the constitution, and most extensive in their oppression; are often introduced merely as engines of corporation influence; for in some instances, the produce of the tax does not pay the expence of collection; were the sense of the nation fairly taken, it is impossible to believe but that whatever sum might be necessary for the public service, it would be raised by means less obnoxious and less expensive". Howell, State Trials, XXIV, 576-577.

classes' from the shackles of excessive and class-biased taxation.

On 19 November 1792 Sir William Maxwell, a Dumfrieshire country gentleman, and county reformer, wrote in alarm to the Duke of Buccleugh stating that the "Emissaries of sedition" had been at work in the county convincing many of "the lower orders" that "the King is an useless & burthensome Member in the Community.. that he & his family should be set adrift, for that taxes are only levied to support their state, luxury & extravagance", and that "taxes, under which the people groan, are paid by the poor, whilst the nobles and lairds are in a great measure exempted".²⁹² When the Edinburgh General Committee of the Friends of the People met, on 20 June 1793, to discuss "whether men or property ought to be represented in Parliament", a certain "Mr. Clarke" pointed out that the present parliament, which represented property, "laid heavy burdens on the Poor, while the rich in many cases entirely escaped them - Witness the malt tax, which fell heavily on the middling or lower ranks while the rich might brew as much as they pleased without paying a penny to Government."²⁹³ Few bourgeois reformers would agree with Mr. Clarke on the need for universal suffrage and fewer still would share the republican sentiments of the Dumfriesshire radicals and Dundee rioters, but both bourgeois and artisan radicals agreed on the need for a substantial reform in the system of parliamentary representation. Such a reform, an Address of the Edinburgh Friends of the People, dated 4 October 1793, claimed, was "the only measure that can... check an increasing and oppressive system of taxation."²⁹⁴ The 'Paisley

292. Sir William Maxwell to the Duke of Buccleugh, 19 November 1792. The Buccleugh Muniments SRO. GD224/31/19/7, f50. The Duke thought Maxwell's letter to be of such importance that he had a copy made and sent to the Home Office, see Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH 2/4/65, ff54-57.

293. J.B. to William Scott, 21 June 1793. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH 2/4/71, ff275-278.

294. Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 566.

Declaration', which was being distributed in the west of Scotland at the same time as Maxwell was expressing his alarm to Buccleugh, summed up the radical position perfectly. It stated that

"With the poor exception, then, of one year of freedom in seven, and that in favour of not one-seventh part of the nation, it is demonstrated that you are constantly taxed without being represented, and compelled to obey laws to which you have never given assent. Are not these the very definitions of slavery? And, are you not thus degraded to a level with the very cattle in the field, and the sheep in the fold; which are a property to those who rule over them, and have no power to say, why are we bought and sold? Why are we yoked and laden with heavy burthens? Why are we fleeced and led to the slaughter? Demand then with one voice, friends and countrymen, that share in making your own laws to which, by the constitution and the laws of nature you are entitled... Pursue the only course which can ever effect any considerable reduction of debts and taxes, or materially advance the interests of manufactures and commerce! In short be free, prosperous and happy!"²⁹⁵

The outcome of the Parliamentary debates on the abolition of the slave trade and burgh reform reinforced the conclusions that many were drawing from government taxation policy in general and the Corn Law of 1791 in particular. The contemptuous disregard for Scottish public opinion displayed in relation to these issues within less than a month, in April 1792, further illustrated how out of touch with and disregarding of public feeling Parliament, and the governing classes which it represented, had become.

295. IBID, 123.

The defeat of Wilberforce's motion, 19 April 1791, for leave to bring in a bill to abolish the slave trade shocked liberal opinion, which consoled itself with the thought that "the arguments used in the last debate, though they could not convince the House of Commons, have produced a very great effect on that large portion of the public whose hearts are not hardened by opulence, nor their understandings corrupted by commercial and political prejudices."²⁹⁶ Romilly's opinion proved to be well founded. When the abolitionists renewed their campaign in the early months of 1792 they received massive popular support. From January to April 1792 the Scottish press was bombarded with advertisements denouncing the slave trade, calling on Parliament to abolish it, and announcing the advertisers' intention of petitioning Parliament. Presbyteries, kirk-sessions, and congregations of both established and seceding churches, burgh councils, trade incorporations, merchant guilds, friendly societies, trade clubs, parish and burgh meetings, and societies of all kinds placed such advertisements. Across the country petitions were drawn up, subscribed, and dispatched to Westminster. The two largest petitions were those of Glasgow and Edinburgh subscribed by "upwards of 13,300" and 10,885 persons respectively.²⁹⁷ As the 'Bee' put it, in March 1792, "In this country, at large, nothing seems to engross the attention of the people, so much as the abolition of the slave trade. There is scarcely a community or a description of men who have not met together and either published resolutions inimical to the slave trade, or petitioned parliament for its abolition!"²⁹⁸

296. Sir S. Romilly. "Memoirs of the Life of Sir Samuel Romilly, written by himself; with a selection from his correspondence. Edited by his sons." 3 Vols. (London, 1840), I, Letter LXXIX, 426.

297. The Glasgow Mercury, 13-20 March 1792, and The Caledonian Mercury, 29 March 1792.

298. The Bee, or Literary Weekly Intelligencer, VIII, 'Historical Chronicle', V.

One "description of men", the landed classes, were, however, conspicuous by their lack of enthusiasm for the campaign. On 25 February 'Humanitas' wrote to the 'Caledonian Mercury' stating his pleasure at the sight of "so many associations formed everywhere in the country, expressing their abhorrence of the Slave Trade", but asking "Why do not the counties call meetings to take the opinion of the gentlemen of landed property on this subject?"²⁹⁹ This letter elicited a reply from 'A Freeholder' who admitted "the spirit of indifference... so eminent in Scotland" among the landed classes and explained it thus "Sitting at their ease, in the quiet enjoyment of their liberties, their luxuries, their business or science, or attached to politics, they are not the better disposed to turn their eyes to the affecting tale of woe contained in the mass of evidence laid before the House of Commons."³⁰⁰

This "spirit of indifference" may help to explain why only three counties³⁰¹ petitioned for the abolition of that "inhuman trade", but other, political, factors were also involved. To many conservatives, and the landed classes were in general conservatively minded, the abolitionist cause was tainted not only by opposition Whig and, more worryingly, radical leadership, but also by an alarming level of popular involvement. On 7 March Lord Provost James Stirling of Edinburgh wrote to Henry Dundas stating that "Whatever may be the real spirit of these associations in the different parts of the united Kingdoms it evidently appears to me very strongly mixed here with politics, supported and promoted chiefly by characters wishing to embarrass administration."³⁰²

299. The Caledonian Mercury, 27 February 1792.

300. IBID, 3 March 1792.

301. The three counties were Stirlingshire, Kirkcudbrightshire and Dumfriesshire. See, 'The Caledonian Mercury', 17 and 29 March 1792.

302. SRO Melville Papers GD51/5/637, fl. Stirling added that "I steadily resisted repeated application for leave to meet in one of the churches, as that may nay woud [sic] have been construed by them, a degree of public countenance... of which I did not imagine you woud approve."

One day earlier the Duke of Buccleugh's factor, John Alves, had written to his employer, a close political ally of Henry Dundas, reporting with open hostility on the progress of a petition chiefly promoted by "Schismatics" and signed by "Coalliers & all Descriptions of People", and commenting on "the Madness of the Times."³⁰³ Moreover, while the Moderate Party, the ecclesiastical allies of both the landed interest and government, was opposed to the slave trade³⁰⁴, at least some of its leadership viewed the abolitionists' campaign with distaste and alarm. The Rev. Alexander Carlyle wrote to Professor John Walker, of the University of Edinburgh, 19 April 1792, stating that Upper Canada "may provide a Comfortable Asylum for Posterity, When the Rage of Republicanism shall drive away the... Rational Subjects from this Island. After what has happen'd about the Slave Trade, I suspect that Period may be at no Great Distance; For the success of that restless Party, will encourage them to raise a fresh Crusade to mend the Constitution. And if they once begin to that... the Lord knows Where it may End."³⁰⁵ Carlyle's opinion of the abolitionists was echoed by Principal Hill. Hill informed Home Secretary Dundas that he would "oppose with all my weight" any attempt on the part of the church to convey "the most oblique approbation of the manner in which Petitions on the Slave Trade had been obtained or of the general system of operating upon the Legislature by petitions from those who have no patrimonial interest in the subject in view: because I considered that whole system as a branch of the moral doctrines which are now industriously propagated and a setting an example upon a popular subject of future application that might tend to unhinge the Constitution."³⁰⁶

303. SRO Buccleugh Muniments. GD 224/659/1, f28.

304. I.D.L. Clark, "Moderatism and the Moderate Party", 22.

305. EUL. Laing MSS. Division III. No. 352.

306. George Hill to H. Dundas, 25 May 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH 2/4/63, f61.

What alarmed conservatives like Hill was not the abolitionists' objective, but their employment of organised public opinion to pressurise Parliament. That "schismatics... Coalliers, & all Descriptions of People" should presume to involve themselves in political matters was, to such men, a fearsome new development.

Carlyle's fears were somewhat exaggerated. The abolitionist campaign attracted support from a wide variety of sources, many of which were far from being inspired by a republican rage. The Presbytery of Perth or the Council Chamber of the burgh of Renfrew, for example, were hardly hot-beds of radicalism. Nevertheless conservative apprehensions were not groundless. In Edinburgh the great abolitionist meeting of 5 March 1792³⁰⁷ was chaired by Henry Erskine (1746-1817), Dean of the Faculty of Advocates, prominent burgh and county reformer, and standard-bearer of the opposition Whigs in Scotland. Among the other prominent men present were Lt. Col. James Francis Erskine and his brother John Francis Erskine, both of whom were "connected with the Dean of Faculty and Opposition"³⁰⁸ and interested in reform,³⁰⁹ and Lord Daer (1763-1794), a leading reformer³¹⁰. In Glasgow the chairman of the local

307. The meeting, it was estimated, was attended by "between three and four thousand persons." 'The Caledonian Mercury', 5 March 1792.

308. C. Adam, op cit, 81-82.

309. James Francis Erskine was actively involved in the county reform movement in 1792. See his letter to William Adam, 17 April 1792. Blair Adam Muniments. General Correspondence, 1792, A-Z. John Francis Erskine of Alloa and Mar was named in a letter from Archibald Fletcher to Robert Graham of Gartmore, 17 June 1792 as one of those whom the author believed to be interested in setting up a society of the Friends of the People in Scotland. SRO Cunninghame Graham Muniments GD22/1/3/5.

310. Daer was a member of the London committee of the burgh reformers, A. Fletcher, op cit, 63. He attended the delegate convention of the county reformers on 2 July 1792, C. Wyvill, op cit, III, 36. Daer was also a member of the radical Society for Constitutional Information. ed. F.D. Cartwright. "The Life and Correspondence of Mayor Cartwright" (London, 1826) I, 134. He became an original member of the London Association of the Friends of the People. IBID, II, 347.

society for the Abolition of the African Slave Trade was David Dale, the cotton master and future member of the Glasgow Association of the Friends of the People³¹¹, while in Perth one of the leading figures in the abolitionist movement was George Meliss, a local merchant, burgh reformer, and, later, leading member of the Perth Friends of the People.³¹² In Montrose the Rev. Frederick McFarlane was elected to the committee entrusted with organising the local abolitionist petition³¹³, while in Whitburn McFarlane's fellow Antiburgher radical Archibald Bruce filled an identical post.³¹⁴ Moreover, on 30 January 1792 the Universal Liberty Club met for the first time in Portsoy, its objects being "the extension of liberty and of the rights of man, the abolition of the slave trade, the repeal of various oppressive and disgraceful laws &c. &c."³¹⁵ In England too a similar picture emerges. Granville Sharp, the chairman of the London Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, was a member of the radical Society for Constitutional Information, as were Thomas Walker and Thomas Cooper, two leading figures in first the anti-slave trade movement and later the radical reform movement in Manchester.³¹⁶

311. For his chairmanship of the Glasgow Society for the Abolition of the African Slave Trade, see 'The Glasgow Mercury', 7-14 February 1792. For his membership of the Glasgow Association of the Friends of the People, see Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 174.

312. For his involvement in the abolitionist movement see 'The Caledonian Mercury', 14 January 1792. He attended the burgh reformers' convention in 1789. 'The Caledonian Mercury', 14 September 1789. He was named as one of "the leading Men" in the Perth Friends of the People by an anonymous informant. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH 2/4/64, ff 341-343.

313. The Caledonian Mercury, 15 March 1792.

314. IBID, 10 March 1792.

315. IBID, 4 February 1792.

316. J. Walvin, op cit, 10, 37 and 39. In this connection it is interesting to note that Thomas Hardy, the secretary of the London Corresponding Society, assumed that anyone connected with the campaign to abolish the slave trade would be friendly towards parliamentary reform. He wrote to the Rev. Mr. Byrant, 21 March 1792, that from Byrant's anti-slave trade activities he had "inferred... that you was a friend of freedom on the broad basis of the Rights of Man." British Library, ADD Mss 27811, f5.

The defeat, on 2 April 1792, of Wilberforce's motion for an immediate abolition of the slave trade and the adoption, at Henry Dundas' instigation, of an alternative scheme, shot-through with loop holes, for the gradual termination of the trade scandalised public opinion in general and the abolitionist campaigners in particular. What rankled was not just that Parliament had chosen to ignore the pleas of a vast number of people, but that, as a meeting of the inhabitants of Falkirk put it, "what is morally wrong cannot be politically right."³¹⁷ For the average Scotsman the slave trade was a profoundly emotive and moral issue which afforded no ground for disputation. The Six Incorporated Trades of the Barony of Portsburgh together with the Cordiners of Potterrow, for example, met in Edinburgh, 2 March 1792, and resolved that both the slave trade and slavery itself³¹⁸ "are inconsistent with the principles of a free nation, are repugnant to the feelings of humanity, are a direct violation of every principle of liberty and justice, and are disgraceful to the religion by law established in the British Empire."³¹⁹ The Glasgow Society for the Abolition of the African Slave Trade undoubtedly spoke for many when, on 9 April 1792, it condemned parliament for

317. The Caledonian Mercury, 10 March 1792. See also the resolution of the parish of Kettle, Fife, that "The Parish does not enter into the political importance or non-importance of this trade, because they judge that no political expediency can justify injustice, or sanction the violation of all the laws of humanity, and because they believe the world is so framed and constituted by the Great LORD thereof, as to require no aids of moral iniquity to the right and prosperous government of the Nations." IBID, 11 February 1792.

318. Although the campaign aimed only at the abolition of the slave trade, there can be no doubt that Scottish opinion was also opposed to slavery itself. The same arguments employed to denounce the slave trade could with equal propriety be employed against slavery. Moreover, some petitioners and resolutioners explicitly stated their opposition to slavery. The parishioners of Whitburn, for example, resolved that "measures should be concerted for converting their [the slaves] brutal slavery into a reasonable human service, founded on the basis of equity and voluntary service." 'The Caledonian Mercury', 10 March 1792.

319. The Caledonian Mercury, 3 March 1792.

attempting to mislead "the people by false appearances of gratifying their wishes" and urged "every friend to humanity and justice... to use all constitutional means for procuring the real speedy, and effectual abolition of a trade, which now stands condemned by... the voice of the people."³²⁰

Following Glasgow's advice the parishioners of Kippen, Stirlingshire, resolved to petition the House of Commons for the "speedy termination" of the trade,³²¹ but others decided that there was no point in further petitioning and hit upon other, if more round-about, "constitutional means" of achieving their objective. Niel Douglas was almost certainly not alone in concluding that the abolition of that "iniquitous trade" would have to await the reform of the House of Commons.³²² Moreover to men like Douglas there were other political lessons to be drawn from the outcome of the slave trade question. Was it likely, they asked, that the friends of slavery abroad would prove to be the friends of liberty at home?³²³ All in all it was no coincidence that when the

320. The Glasgow Mercury, 3-10 April 1792. Four days earlier the London society had declared "That a gradual abolition of the Slave Trade is not an adequate remedy for its injustice and cruelty, neither can it be deemed a compliance with the general wishes of the people, expressed in their numerous and urgent petitions to Parliament." 'The Caledonian Mercury', 12 April 1792. The committee of the Edinburgh society issued, on 10 April, a more moderately worded statement. The committee declared that they "do wait the further decision of the House of Commons upon the Bill which is intended to be brought in for the abolition of the Slave Trade, in full confidence that the Representatives of this nation will determine upon the total abolition, and fix the very shortest possible term for the existence of a trade detestable in its nature." IBID.

321. The Kippen petition was signed by the minister, 5 elders, 5 resident heritors, and 319 heads of families. 'The Glasgow Mercury', 17-24 April 1792.

322. Douglas remarked that "we may despair of a British senate, of the present complexion, ultroneously doing them [the slaves] justice." N. Douglas, "Thoughts on Modern Politics", 17.

323. Douglas wrote that "One is tempted to think, there must be something egregiously defective in any government that can contrive at, or sanction in any of its subjects, or in any part of its dependancies, such evils as attend this traffic in all its stages. We can scarce suppose that the spirit which patronises Slavery abroad, can be very friendly to reform at home, or those who abet its cause." IBID, 6-7.

"Constitutional Club" of Kilmarnock and the Glasgow "Friends of Freedom" met to celebrate the anniversary of the French Revolution, on 14 July 1792, their toasts in support of the immediate abolition of the slave trade were coupled with others in favour of parliamentary reform.³²⁴

The rejection of Wilberforce's motion was soon followed by another parliamentary insult to public opinion, when, on 18 April, Sheridan's motion relative to burgh reform was thrown out. Popular feeling was outraged, and the 'Glasgow Courier' commented, 10 May, on the "spirit of discontent [which] prevails in some parts of Scotland respecting the Scots Borough Reform."³²⁵ In Dundee, Aberdeen, and Brechin the 'mob' displayed their "intemperate... disapprobation" of Old Corruption's victory by committing to the flames effigies of its Scottish champion, Henry Dundas,³²⁶ while in Edinburgh and Portsoy plans were hatched to celebrate the King's birthday in similar fashion. In both places these plans were discovered by the authorities, who took preventive action. But while no serious disturbance was provoked thereby in Portsoy³²⁷ in Edinburgh the case was far different. There, the introduction of

324. The Kilmarnock Constitutional Club toasted "The Members of the Association of the Friends of the People" and "Mr. Wilberforce, and all the friends for the Abolition of the Slave Trade", while the Glasgow Friends of Freedom toasted "The Friends of the People associated for Parliamentary Reform, and may their patriotic exertions in due time be crowned with success" and "The speedy Abolition of the Slave Trade". 'The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer', 16-20 July 1792, and 'The Glasgow Courier', 17 July 1792. I do not mean to imply that the Glasgow and Kilmarnock clubs wanted parliamentary reform only in order to obtain the immediate abolition of the slave trade, but rather that the clubs linked the one with the other. Other benefits the clubs believed would flow from such a reform.

325. The Glasgow Courier, 10 May 1792.

326. The Edinburgh Evening Courant, 5 and 21 May 1792.

327. The Sheriff Depute of the county and the Provost of the burgh, thinking "that it would be much easier to prevent than suppress a tumult", went, "attended by their peace officers", to the house where the effigy was stored "Seized and destroyed the Effigy and brought the maker prisoner into town", where he was committed to prison. "The day [i.e. 4 June] passed over in great quietness - and tho'a few boys and idle people disposed to mischief assembled at night, yet finding their ringleaders, intimidated by the measures taken, did not appear they were dispersed without any real disturbance and everything has been since perfectly quiet." The Earl of Fife to H. Dundas, 13 June 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH2/4/63, ff 97-100.

dragoons, who rode "furiously through the streets with their swords drawn",³²⁸ and the subsequent forced dispersal of a crowd intent upon nothing more serious than burning an effigy of "that damd puppy Dundas"³²⁹ transformed what would probably have ended up as a relatively minor disturbance into a serious riot. The Edinburgh King's Birthday riot which lasted three nights saw not only Henry Dundas' effigy burned, but also his house and those of his nephew, the Lord Advocate, and the Lord Provost, James Stirling, attacked by an irate crowd intent upon avenging "the unprecedented insult offered this City by bringing an armed force among them."³³⁰ Yet while it is important to note how the rioting escalated because of the over-reaction of the authorities, it is also necessary to remember that its origins were explicitly political. The Edinburgh 'mob' had from the start intended to demonstrate their disapproval of Henry Dundas and, by implication, their support for burgh reform. A contemporary street ballad not only mocked Dundas'

328. The Scots Magazine, LIV, 307. The magazine added that, while the intention had been "to overawe and intimidate" the 'mob', "This behaviour... provoked the indignation of the people, who saluted them with hisses and hootings as they passed along."

329. So called in an anonymous letter, addressed to "The Council Chamber of Edinburgh", which stated that "we are fully determined to burn the Effigy of that damd puppy Dundas, a dishonour to his Country, his name should be scored out of every Society whatsoever, his name is blemished forever... and all the opposition you can make will do not good but evil for all the different trades in this City are determined to have it done." Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH 2/4/63, f173.

330. So expressed in an anonymous letter, signed "J. Patriot. by order of the Committee for the Revolution" and dated 5 June 1792, IBID, f174. This account of the King's Birthday riot is based upon material found in the Home Office papers and in contemporary newspapers and magazines.

unprincipled love of high office and accused him, prophetically, of malversation³³¹, but also denounced him as the friend of burgh corruption who turned a blind eye to evidence of that corruption and a deaf ear to the popular cries for reform. In the ballad Dundas is made to say

"Then what care I for a' their gibes, what's a' their din to me?
What signifies Auld Reekie, Sirs, St. Johnston, and Dundee?
The Scots are Reformation mad, but they are fair to blame,
An idle folk, gin they believe that they'll gar me think shame.

.....

Wha' e'er looks at borough books may find cause to complain,
My way has been to steek my een - the reasons very plain;
All Magistrates are honest men, the Burgesses are thieves,
I like the Corporations, Sirs, think all Reformers knaves."³³²

331. James Tytler's 'Historical Register' published a version of the ballad which illustrated Dundas' notorious ability to hang on to office in a particularly forceful way.

"But should ev'n Bill [Pitt] himself go out,
And Belzebub come in,
I'd bawl for him, you need no doubt,
And make a dev'lish din."

The 'Historical Register's' version was a particularly scurrilous one which, besides referring to Dundas "touching the nation's gold", tastelessly (and inaccurately) alluded to his earlier matrimonial difficulties.

"Thus first and last, through thin or thick,
My care shall be through life,
By any minister to stick
Though not by any wife!"

"The Historical Register: or, Edinburgh Monthly Intelligencer", Vol. I, No. XI, (May, 1792), coverpage.

332. "The Original Scots Ballad of Wha Wants Me? Sung in George Square, Edinburgh, during the Illuminations on the 4th and 5th of June 1792 by the Right Hon. H..y D..d.s." (NP, ND), 3. This pamphlet version of the ballad sold at one penny a copy.

The anti-Dundas riots of May and June 1792 are symptomatic of both a rising groundswell of opinion in favour of reform and a growing sense of disgust at the parliamentary obstructionism of its opponents. Nevertheless there was nothing in any of these riots, or in any of the other disturbances which alarmed government and conservative opinion in the summer of 1792,³³³ to suggest that the lower orders had adopted revolutionary Paineite ideas. It did not require Thomas Paine to teach working men that the old political system was in need of reform; events were teaching that lesson themselves.

Paine's 'Rights of Man' did however play a central, if complicated, role in the history of the origins of the Scottish radical movement. At first the popular impact of this work was considerably hindered by its price. The first part of Paine's magnum opus, (which was published in February 1791), constituted, at 3/6d a copy,³³⁴ a luxury which few individual workmen could afford. Moreover, until the late summer and autumn of 1792 there were, so far as is known, no cheap editions of either the first or second parts (the latter of which was first published in

333. In May the burgh of Lanark saw disturbances over the feuing of a part of the burgh muir. The Provost and councillors of the burgh received threatening letters, and the provost in particular seems to have been "the object of popular resentment". An orchard belonging to him was destroyed, and he was shot at one evening while he sat in his house. The Sheriff of Lanarkshire, William Honeyman, believed that "the real cause" of these disturbances was "an almost universal spirit of reform and opposition to the established Government and legal administration which has wonderfully diffused through the manufacturing towns of this country" and, fearing that the disturbances would get out of hand, he applied "to the Commander in Chief for a detachment of the military which was accordingly sent." William Honeyman to H. Dundas, 8 May 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH 2/4/63, f32. It should be noted that the feuing of burgh lands for nominal dues to councillors, their relatives, or friends was a notorious evil resulting from the system of self-election and as such a grievance of the burgh reformers. The month of July saw disturbances in Berwickshire over toll-roads and in Ross-shire over the introduction of sheep-farms.

334. The Caledonian Mercury, 24 March 1791.

February 1792) available in Scotland. Despite this handicap it seems clear that by the early summer of 1792 the 'Rights of Man' was not an unfamiliar book to lowland Scots. The Proclamation against seditious writings, of 21 May 1792, aroused the curiosity of a public anxious to discover the nature of a book that could create such an alarm within government and, ironically, seems to have speeded up the dissemination of the very book it was designed to act against. The Foxite reformer Norman Macleod claimed that

"The Proclamation acted like an electric shock: it set people of all ranks a-reading: and as everybody in this Country can read, the people are already astonishingly informed. Farmers, ploughmen, peasants, manufacturers, artificers, shopkeepers, sailors are all employed in studying & reasoning on the nature of Society and Government."³³⁵

In June it was reported from Anstruther that the 'Rights of Man' had been "circulated here with great diligence",³³⁶ while in July, Walter Miller, a Perth cabinet-maker, wrote to John Horne Tooke (1736-1812) of the Society for Constitutional Information, informing him of the great popularity and influence of the book in the Perth area, stating that copies he had provided for friends "have already gone through about a dozen of hands", and adding that "I intend to spread them as far

335. Norman Macleod to Charles Grey, 30 November 1792. University of Durham. Earl Grey Papers. 2nd Earl Grey's Papers. Papers on Parliamentary Reform. See also Verus' letter to the 'Caledonian Chronicle', 7 December 1792, in which he claimed that the Proclamation "set the public mind about inquiring into the merits of the business."

336. The Glasgow Courier, 7 June 1792.

as my influence can go."³³⁷ By the early summer of 1792 the growing wave of popular discontent and the increasing interest in and knowledge of radical ideas were beginning to lead to the formation of small radical groups dedicated to the creation of a mass movement for parliamentary reform.³³⁸ As yet, however, their numbers were few, their organisation limited, and their publicity non-existent. In England the situation was somewhat different. There too the dissemination of Paine's 'Rights of Man' went hand in hand with the formation of popular radical societies, but while the Scottish societies were embryonic organisations hidden inside a womb of anonymity, the English clubs were publicity conscious and made no secret of their admiration for Paine.³³⁹ The spectre of popular Paineite radicalism, which appeared in the early months of 1792 in places as far apart as London, Sheffield, and Manchester, alarmed both conservative and reformist Whig alike. In response to this menace a group of reformist Whigs formed themselves, in April 1792, into the Association of the Friends of the People. Their intention was to defeat the Paineite threat by providing the discontented with leadership and by channelling their discontent in a constitutional direction.³⁴⁰ To their

337. J. Walvin, *op cit*, 207-208. Quoting from the Treasury Solicitor's Papers in the Public Record Office, London. T.S. 11. 951. 3495.

338. See below.

339. For example, the Manchester Constitutional Society published resolutions thanking Paine for the second part of his 'Rights of Man'. 'The Caledonian Mercury', 22 March 1792.

340. Charles Grey (1764-1845), in the debate, 30 April 1792, on his own notice of a motion relative to parliamentary reform, stated that - "The fact was, that observing an opinion was rising in the country, that was likely to lead to danger, if means to prevent it were not taken in time, a set of gentlemen, of whom he had the honour to be one, had thought that the best possible means of preventing mischief, was to look into the constitution, and to suggest the correction of such abuses as might be found to exist in its practice, in order to take from its enemies that only great ground of their clamour, that the constitution was beautiful in theory, but corrupt in practice." Grey's fellow associator, William Baker, stated, in the same debate, that it had been argued that the Association had "originated in the Manchester and Sheffield Associations, and adopted the principles of Mr. Paine's book. So far from it, both the one and the other were expressly disclaimed by the Association, the object of which was to prevent any such pernicious doctrines obtaining, by coming forward, and calling upon the people to suggest a moderate correction of the abuses that prevailed in the representation of Parliament." *Parl. Hist.*, XXIX, 1336 and 1339.

surprise they were fiercely attacked not only by the supporters of administration but also by members of their own party. While Pitt crudely portrayed them as the allies of Jacobinism, the conservative Whigs argued that the association would strengthen rather than weaken Paineite radicalism and would prove incapable of controlling the movement it wished to encourage.³⁴¹ There is no doubt that the Proclamation against seditious writings was aimed not only at Paine's 'Rights of Man' but also at the Whig associators, and that it had the backing of the formidably strong conservative wing of the Whig party as well as of the supporters of administration.³⁴² Moreover, as loyal addresses flooded in from the counties and the royal burghs,³⁴³ it also became clear that the Proclamation had the support of the political nation. It was against this background that the burgh reformers had to decide how to respond to the defeat of Sheridan's motion.

341. See Pitt's, Burke's, and Windham's speeches on the Association of the Friends of the People, 30 April 1792, IBID, 1306-1312, 1320-1323, and 1325-1327. The Portlandite wing of the Whig party was more circumspect than Burke's alarmists. They shared the alarmists' fears, but held their tongues in public. P. Brunsdon, op cit, 40-42.

342. The associators themselves had no doubts that the Proclamation was aimed as much at them as at Paine. Charles Grey declared that the Proclamation was intended to create "a jealousy and suspicion [in] the minds of the People, as to the intentions of this society", while his fellow associator Major Thomas Maitland (c1760-1824) stated that it was desire of the authors of the Proclamation "to blend the doctrine of reform with sedition, and to include both in one general odium". Parl Hist, XXIX, 1486 and 1502. The associators were equally aware that the Proclamation had the backing of powerful elements within their own party and concluded that it had been brought forward in order to split the Whigs and, thus, to strengthen Pitt's administration. To Grey, for example, the Proclamation was an "insidious measure... adopted with no other view than to separate those who had been so long connected." IBID, 1481.

343. By the end of June 1792 the counties of Perth, Fife, East Lothian, Ayr, Renfrew, Dumbarton and Lanark, and the royal burghs of Edinburgh, Glasgow, Stirling and Ayr had published advertisements in the Edinburgh and Glasgow press announcing their intention of addressing the King to thank him for the Proclamation. The list is probably representative rather than exhaustive, but it is interesting to note that those areas which were most expeditious in forwarding loyal addresses were to become, with a few additions, the centres of radical activity in the near future. It is possible that the list may indicate those areas in which Paine's 'Rights of Man' had been circulated most widely.

There can be little doubt that the burgh reformers were alarmed as well as disappointed by a parliamentary defeat that patently augured ill for their hopes of future success. The Aberdeen burgh reformers committee met together on 7 May and resolved

"that this Committee feel, with much concern... the obvious disregard with which their just and moderate requests have been treated... and the little attention that has been shown to the decent orderly, and quiet manner in which the petitioners have during the course of eight years conducted their proceedings."³⁴⁴

18 April marked a disastrous defeat which was bound to raise fundamental questions regarding the future strategy of the movement. For some the revival of the parliamentary reform movement under the auspices of the London Friends of the People seemed to offer the best answer to these questions. Archibald Fletcher wrote to Robert Grahame of Gartmore, a fellow leading burgh reformer, on 17 June 1792 stating that "The association of the Friends of the people is the only Party, who at present, points at any thing which so far as I can see, merits the attention of the people at large", and adding that he hoped that Gartmore would join a proposed "similar Institution in Scotland". This Scottish society, he explained, was being planned in Edinburgh by a group of lawyers who claimed to have the support of "Mr. Erskine of Mar, Col. Fullarton, Col. Dalrymple, Mr. Robertson of [?] and some others of that description", and who were only waiting to discover if "they were supported by a concurrence sufficiently respectable, especially of Landed Gentlemen of

344. The Caledonian Mercury, 17 May 1792.

weight and consideration" before declaring themselves.³⁴⁵ In Perth Dr. William Bisset and other burgh reformers, frustrated at being "long trifled with by Parliament",³⁴⁶ were moving towards the same conclusion as Fletcher. In Glasgow the movement's revived interest in parliamentary reform apparently predated the rejection of Sheridan's motion and the formation of the London Friends of the People. As early as 26 March 1792 the Glasgow burgh reformers had "received an elegant silver medal" on which was inscribed, *inter alia*, "the Freedom of Election and an equal Representation."³⁴⁷ Any doubts that may have existed as to whether this inscription accurately reflected the society's views were dispelled when, on 16 July, the society declared that "we affirm that an equal representation of the people is needful" and that "we profess ourselves attached to those worthy characters who style themselves The Friends of

345. SRO. Cunninghame Graham Muniments. GD 22/1/315. See also Norman Macleod to Charles Grey, 4 July 1792, in which Macleod states that "Many of the most reputable people here [i.e. Edinburgh] have assured me that to the Association[i.e. the London Association of the Friends of the People] they owe the exertion of Spirit which is now going on... on the whole, I find the eyes of the public turned on us, & wishing us well... A number of respectable people both for property & character wish to associate on the same principles, & the first meeting will be in two or three days." University of Durham. Earl Grey Papers. 2nd Earl Grey's Papers. Papers on Parliamentary Reform. Among those Edinburgh lawyers mentioned by Fletcher may have been Thomas Muir. Six months later Muir claimed, at the 1st Convention of the Friends of the People, that it was he who made "the first proposal" to form a Scottish Association. Meikle, *op cit*, 265.

346. Bisset made this statement at the 1st Convention of the Friends of the People. Meikle, *op cit*, 263. A correspondent of the 'Caledonian Mercury' pointed out that the Perth Friends of the People had originated from Parliament's refusal to listen to the grievances of the burgesses. 'The Caledonian Mercury', 12 November 1792. When the burgh reformers met in convention, on 25 July 1792, it was the Perth delegates, along with those from Glasgow and Dundee, who appear to have been most forward in arguing that the movement unite with the Friends of the People. Norman Macleod reported that "the Delegates from Glasgow, Perth, and Dundee... moved & carried that a circular letter should be sent to every Burgh, desiring them to instruct their Delegates, & to acquaint the Standing Committee at Edin' whether they wished to join with the Friends of the People." Norman Macleod to Charles Grey, 13 August 1792. *Loc. cit.*

347. The Glasgow Mercury, 20-27 March 1792.

the People".³⁴⁸ However, despite this increasing support for parliamentary reform the debate within the burgh reform movement was far from over. Behind the scenes Henry Erskine and his allies were working feverishly to dissuade the movement from throwing in its lot with the Friends of the People. Erskine deplored that, at a time when dangerous Paineite doctrines were gaining ground in Britain, "general complaints of the defects of the British Constitution should have been brought forward" by the London Friends of the People. Moreover he lamented "that the remedy proposed has been left so vague and undefined." The Whig associators, he argued, would only succeed in raising "a general cry of reform" so that "two very serious evils will arise;-

"First, A Flame will be excited in the country which the exertions of the Association will in vain attempt to extinguish; and, secondly, Those very individuals [i.e. the Association]..., will find that they have lost the confidence of the lower ranks of the people, by means of which they might have been able, at some future period of a different complexion, to have obtained by means of the moderate sound of the public voice that rational degree of reform of which... our constitution would admit."

Erskine therefore resolved to exert his influence "for the purpose of moderating the violent spirit of innovation I perceive, with regret, to be rising in this part of the United Kingdom" and to urge his friends to adopt a like course.³⁴⁹ Clearly, when the burgh reform delegates met together in Edinburgh, on 25 July, for their annual convention, much hard talking would take place before any far reaching decision was taken.

348. The Glasgow Courier, 19 July 1792.

349. Henry Erskine to Sir Gilbert Elliot, 14 June 1792. ed. The Countess of Minto, op cit, II, 58-60.

Meanwhile, on 2 July, the county reformers met together in Edinburgh in convention "for the purpose of framing the heads of a bill" to be forwarded to Parliament in the next session.³⁵⁰ However the political atmosphere had changed considerably since the counties had met, on 30 April, to elect their delegates. The opposition Whigs, who had earlier championed the cause, had mostly lost their enthusiasm, while the country gentlemen had become, in general, more apprehensive of the dangers involved in raising a cry for reform. Thus when determined reformers, such as Lt. Col. William Dalrymple, Lord Daer, and Lt. Col. Norman Macleod,³⁵¹ (the last two of whom were members of the London Friends of the People), arrived at the convention they discovered that their apprehensions of an 'unholy alliance' between ministerialists and conservative Whigs "to defeat the idea of reform by halfmeasures" were well founded. Macleod's proposal that the convention adopt a scheme to transfer the franchise from feudal superiors to actual proprietors and to lower the qualification from £400 to £100 Scots was rejected, while the conservative Whig delegates, "recommending... moderation and unanimity", succeeded in convincing a readily convinced convention that it was "better to make the first step by general expressions rather than by discussion of particular principles."³⁵² Thus, rather than commit

350. The Freeholders and Commissioners of Supply for each county had met, on 30 April, to "appoint delegates... to meet at Edinburgh, on Monday the 2ND of July next, for the purpose of framing the heads of a bill, for altering and amending the present laws which concern the Election of Commissioners to serve in Parliament for the different Counties." 'The Glasgow Mercury', 10-17 April 1792.

351. Named as attending the convention in 'The Glasgow Courier', 7 July 1792.

352. Norman Macleod to Charles Grey, 4 July 1792. Loc cit.

themselves to a particular scheme of reform, the convention unanimously passed a motion, proposed by Sir Thomas Dundas, the conservative opposition Whig MP for Stirlingshire, and seconded, significantly, by Lord Advocate Dundas, that a committee be appointed to draw up reform proposals to be considered by the next convention in the following December.³⁵³ The convention had decided to mark time. William Robertson wrote to William Adam (1751-1839), one of the leading opposition Whigs, joyfully reporting that "it is entirely owing to the good management & address of the Dean & Sir Thomas Dundas that matters have been conducted with so much moderation."³⁵⁴

To all those with eyes to see the convention's irresolution clearly revealed a landed interest increasingly nervous about the advisability of proceeding with even minor schemes of parliamentary reform in the threatening political climate of July 1792. The prospect of a Scottish society of the Friends of the People securing "a concurrence sufficiently respectable... of Landed Gentlemen" was both distant and unlikely. However it was not seen that way by the friends of reform whose enthusiasm blinded them to hard reality. The 'Glasgow Advertiser' considered that, in view of the convention's outcome, county reform would be obtained "at no very distant period" and that burgh reform, "which is also much wanted", would follow naturally in its wake. The same newspaper optimistically declared that "There is little doubt but those important objects will be granted by Parliament, at a proper time, when applied for, constitutionally, by a majority of the inhabitants of Scotland."³⁵⁵ This opinion was shared by reformers far nearer the centre of political debate. Norman Macleod wrote to Charles Grey, 4 July 1792, "to assure you that it

353. The Glasgow Courier, 7 July 1792, and The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer, 2-6 July 1792.

354. William Robertson to W. Adam, 3 July 1792. Blair Adam Muniments. General Correspondence, 1792, A-Z.

355. The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer, 2-6 July 1792.

has strongly appeared that the sense of the Country is not only general but unanimous for Reform... Indeed I am certain that you will have a bill supported by the general cry of Scotland to discuss next Session."³⁵⁶

Over one month later Macleod had lost little of his initial optimism, but he was prepared to acknowledge that the friends of the "Duke of Portland & the great Family interests in England" were "likely to give us... Trouble."³⁵⁷ This slightly more cautious note was probably struck in response to the events of 25 and 26 July.

For some time prior to the meeting of the burgh reform convention groups of radical reformers had been meeting "in different places of the City" of Edinburgh.³⁵⁸ These radicals, led by John Clark, a mason, William Skirving, a tenant farmer, and John Buchanan, a baker, ambitiously aimed at creating a "general association" for parliamentary reform which would not only mobilise those social classes previously excluded from politics but also "by its moderate firm and constitutional proceedings draw over the landed and borough interests to its view."³⁵⁹ Thus, when the delegates to the burgh reform convention arrived in Edinburgh informal soundings were taken concerning "the propriety of the general association proposed." The burgh reformers who had been consulted "approved greatly of the measure & accordingly steps were immediately taken to commence a joint and general effort to obtain what it now appeared impossible to effect by partial applications."³⁶⁰ A meeting between the representatives of the burgh reformers and those of

356. Norman Macleod to Charles Grey, 4 July 1792. Loc. cit.

357. Norman Macleod to Charles Grey, 13 August 1792. Loc. cit.

358. "The Minute Book of the Edinburgh Society of the Friends of the People", 9 August 1792. JC 26/280. It is probable that similar groups were meeting in other cities and towns, but positive evidence is lacking.

359. Draft "Address to the Reformers of the Counties & the Boroughs". Dateable to 1793. JC 26/280.

360. IBID.

the shadowy "Societies of the Friends for general Reform" was therefore arranged for 26 July at Fortune's Tavern³⁶¹ to inaugurate the new association. However, when the convention assembled the friends of parliamentary reform discovered "that the temper of the burgesses at large was not yet prepared for a union."³⁶² Norman Macleod, who had been delegated by Inverness, "found amidst a strong general desire of Reform, a good deal of backwardness, a want of vigour, & an ignorance or neglect of that method of acting effectually: all owing to the same persons who think they are obliging high interests in England."³⁶³ And so it fell out. The convention rejected the proposed association, "being afraid that it might impede the success of their plan of Burgh Reform".³⁶⁴

The friends of the proposed association, however, refused to accept the convention's decision as final. The Fortune's Tavern meeting went ahead. At the meeting "the Delegates from the Burghs resolved to get the consent of their Constituents to the measure adopted and to prevail on them to send Delegates to another Convention... that the plan proposed and now approved might be finally settled by a coalition of Delegates from the several Societies of both."³⁶⁵ When Erskine was informed that the question of associating with the Friends of the People had been resurrected, he wrote an indignant letter to Archibald Fletcher denouncing the proposal as dishonourable and stating that should it be accepted he would immediately sever his connection with the movement.³⁶⁶

361. "The Minute Book of the Edinburgh Society of the Friends of the People", 9 August 1792. JC 26/280.

362. A. Fergusson. "The Honourable Henry Erskine. Lord Advocate for Scotland with notices of certain of his kinsfolk and of his time" (Edinburgh, 1882), 333.

363. Norman Macleod to Charles Grey, 13 August 1792. Loc. cit.

364. William Bisset's explanation given to the 1st Convention of the Friends of the People. Meikle, op cit, 262.

365. Draft "Address to the Reformers of the Counties & the Boroughs." JC 26/280.

366. Henry Erskine to Archibald Fletcher, [26 July?, 1792]. Published in A. Fergusson, "The Honourable Henry Erskine", 331-334.

Erskine's threatened resignation, and the loss of support from his numerous and well-connected friends and allies which that threat implied, forced the friends of association to back down. With the hostility of government and its supporters guaranteed, the burgh reform movement, they calculated, could hardly afford to make enemies of the leader of the opposition in Scotland, his friends, and allies. Thus, while individual burgh reformers joined the Friends of the People, the movement as a corporate entity remained aloof.

The Fortune Tavern's meeting, "after recognizing fully, the neglect and contempt that has all along been shewn to the measures of the Association for Burgh Reform by those who are in power", decided that "the only measure for obtaining this, as well as every other reform, was a General Association of the whole people, to petition and insist upon an equal representation of the Citizens at large."³⁶⁷ To that purpose the meeting resolved to constitute itself "into a permanent Society, under the appellation of The Associated Friends of the People". The choice of title was significant. The new society's objectives were modelled on those of its London namesake. The meeting resolved "That the object of this Association be to attempt by all Constitutional means, the attainment, first, of an equal Representation of the People; and second, of a more limited duration of Parliamentary Delegation". Moreover the association declared that they had formed their "permanent Society" in order to collect "the real and unbiased voice of the people on the subject of their Parliamentary Representation" and to take "into consideration the means best adapted for restoring our Constitution to its original purity."³⁶⁸ Thus, like its mentor in London, the Scottish Association

367. "The Minute Book of the Edinburgh Society of the Friends of the People", 9 August 1792. JC 26/230.

368. IBID. The declaration and resolutions of the meeting were published widely. See, for example, 'The Caledonian Mercury', 28 July 1792 and 'The Glasgow Courier', 7 August 1792.

refused to anticipate the outcome of its endeavours by declaring its support for a particular scheme of parliamentary reform. The declared objective was kept vague, not out of any deference to London, but because the radicals hoped to create "a General Association of the whole people". They still believed that the county and burgh reform movements could be won over to the cause, and feared that a declaration in favour of a particular scheme of reform would scare away potential recruits. The same motives lay behind the association's stress upon the constitutionality of the methods to be employed in "restoring our Constitution to its original purity." The terms employed indicated, and were meant to indicate, that this was no revolutionary Paineite association, but rather a truly constitutional organisation in which respectable burgh and county reformers could happily join. Moreover, there is no reason to think that the associators were less than sincere in these declarations. The Scottish Association of the Friends of the People, like the London association, was formed in order to prevent, by means of a parliamentary reform, the country from slipping into either revolution or tyranny. On 28 August 1792 a letter from the Edinburgh Association to the Chairman of the General³⁶⁹ Association of the Friends of the People was read at a meeting in the Barber's Hall. It stated that

"Its [i.e. the Association's] success will prevent total and unavoidable Revolution with all its impending evils... If you and the other generous Promoters of a general Association shall succeed in collecting the public sentiment to be expressed in the deliberate voice of Delegation so as to prevent all tumultuary risings of the people, if you shall be able to put our dear country in the invincible state of regular

369. The London Association.

association & unanimity, and thereby secure the blessings of internal peace and universal confidence [in Parliament], and if you shall prevail to procure to the Nation as free Citizens, the right of choosing its own governors... generations to come will bless you."³⁷⁰

The riots of May and June 1792 and the spread of Paineite ideas, which in all probability lay behind the decision of the county and burgh reformers to chart a more cautious course than would otherwise have been the case,³⁷¹ acted as a powerful stimulus to the formation of the Scottish Friends of the People. In one sense the purpose of the Fortune's Tavern meeting was to create an organisation which could direct the growing discontent of the lower orders into constitutional channels.

370. The Minute Book of the Edinburgh Society of the Friends of the People, 28 August 1792. JC 26/280. See also William Skirving's letter to Alexander McGibbon, the secretary of the Stirling Friends of the People, 26 October 1793, in which he writes: "Permit me... to assure you that my great object in urging our association first and last was to prevent revolution (which I have seen for years past approaching with hasty strides) by a substantial reform". JC 26/280. A draft "Address to the Public from the Friends of the People", dateable to late 1793, warned that a wicked combination had been formed to establish tyranny throughout Europe. The Friends of the People, the address stated, had been formed "to prevent our own country from being involved in so disastrous a combination, and... to check the spirit of revolution by a moderate and substantial reform." JC 26/280. Alexander Aitchison wrote "that AA does not wish a bloody revolution in this Country (however much he may fear it) as there is nothing that Britons want, that is worthy of the numberless lives that would be lost, before it could be obtained. To prevent such a direful catastrophe... AA early joined the friends of reform." Alexander Aitchison to the Rev. Alexander Carlyle, 2 August 1794. EUL. MSS Dc4.41., f141.

371. It is probable, had these riots never taken place and had Paine's 'Rights of Man' never attracted popular interest, that the county reformers' convention would have drawn up a bill to forward to Parliament and that the burgh reformers' convention would have declared for parliamentary reform.

The studied moderation and constitutionalism displayed by the Fortune's Tavern meeting's declaration and resolutions were to remain the hall-marks of the Scottish radical movement until the summer of 1793.

The prospects for the new movement appeared bright to its founders. The disappointments of the county and burgh reformers' conventions they attributed not to any conservative caution on the part of the delegates but to the activities of Henry Erskine and his friends.³⁷² Hopes were high that both movements could be persuaded to join in a mass movement for parliamentary reform. Moreover, within the country generally it was clear that discontent was rising and that the demand for parliamentary reform was getting louder. From East Linton in the east to Kilmarnock in the west Bastille Day had been celebrated with calls for parliamentary reform.³⁷³ The question was whether the associators could convert their hopes of creating a national movement for parliamentary reform into reality. Such a movement, drawing its leadership from the propertied classes, would be difficult to resist and undoubtedly moderate in both its methods and objectives. Should the Fortune's Tavern associators fail Erskine's nightmare would be realised. A popular movement would emerge whose devotion to moderate reform was less sure and whose ability to influence the legislature was doubtful.

372. See Norman Macleod's letters to Charles Grey, 4 July and 13 August 1792. Loc. cit. See also the draft "Address to the Reformers of the Counties & the Boroughs" in which it was stated that "the Friends of the People were much astonished to find that the greatest exertions, and the utmost influence was used to prevent the Societies for Burgh reform from agreeing to this wise plan [of association], and indeed from meeting at all again in convention." Loc. cit.

373. For accounts of the Bastille Day celebrations in Scotland in 1792 see 'The Glasgow Courier', 17 July 1792, 'The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer', 16-20 July, and 'The Caledonian Mercury', 14 and 28 July 1792.

CHAPTER III

Bright Hopes and Dark Fears

The Fortune's Tavern meeting of 26 July 1792 was of national more than local importance. It was held in order to institute a national movement for parliamentary reform. Representatives "assembled from different parts of the country"¹ to form an association which aimed at mobilising public opinion throughout Scotland. The intention, no doubt, was that the 'country' representatives would return to their localities to set up similar societies,² but the meeting also sought to stimulate the formation of reform societies in areas which were not represented at Fortune's Tavern. To this end the Declaration and Resolutions of the meeting were advertised widely. This self-advertisement was of the greatest importance, for without it many areas of the country would have remained as ignorant of the association's existence as they had of that of the publicity-shy societies of the Friends of General Reform. A national movement was only possible if radical groups throughout the country were aware of each other's existence.

1. The Caledonian Mercury, 28 July 1792.

2. It should be noted that at least one such society had been formed prior to the Fortune's Tavern meeting. On 23 July 1792 a society "for the purpose of effecting a Constitutional and Parliamentary Reform" was instituted at a meeting in the Prince of Wales' Tavern, Glasgow. The society complained "of the numberless corruptions and abuses which deform" the British constitution, which "abuses are solely to be attributed to the present inadequate state of the representation of the People". The meeting passed resolutions in favour of equal representation, "the universal right of suffrage", frequent elections, burgh reform, trial by jury in civil cases, and "the full and unrestrained liberty of the press." 'The Caledonian Mercury', 4 August 1792, and 'The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer', 23-27 July 1792. The subsequent history of this society is shrouded in mystery. No further references either to the society itself or to its office bearers have been discovered.

The publication of the Fortune's Tavern resolutions established a pattern. Henceforth new radical societies generally placed advertisements in the press announcing to the rest of Scotland the fact of their existence, their political principles, and the names of their office bearers. These advertisements fulfilled four purposes.³ Firstly, by declaring where the society met or who its office holders were they assisted the recruitment of new members, secondly, by making radical groups aware that they were not alone in desiring parliamentary reform they bolstered confidence and, thus, stimulated the formation of other societies, thirdly, by generally stating a commitment to "equal representation" and more frequent parliamentary elections they proclaimed the essential unity that bound the various societies together, and lastly, by providing the names of office holders they facilitated correspondence and, thus, the exchange of political opinion and, to a limited extent, the formulation of national policy. Nothing bolstered the morale of radical societies so much as the knowledge that they were not isolated groups of political eccentrics but part of a great popular movement. Without access to the press there must be some doubt whether such a movement could have been formed.

In the weeks following on the Fortune's Tavern meeting much progress was made. In Edinburgh itself the movement grew apace. Such a "great number of citizens attended" the first meeting of the new society on what Alexander Aitchison referred to as "the memorable 9th of August"³ that it was decided to hold the next meeting in the more spacious Barbers' Hall.⁴ Throughout August recruits continued to flood

3. Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 528.

4. "The Minute Book of the Edinburgh Society of the Friends of the People", 9 August 1792. The minutes record that "the place of meeting being so much crowded" it was agreed to hold the next meeting at Barbers Hall. JC 26/280.

in⁵, and on 28 August it was reported that "about two hundred persons" were present in Barbers' Hall.⁶ Membership had increased so dramatically that it was becoming clear that the society would soon face the greatest difficulty in accommodating its members in one place. A "plan of organisation" was therefore produced at the 28 August meeting and referred, with amendments, to the standing committee who were charged with presenting it to a proposed general meeting. The draft plan of organisation proposed that the society "be divided into smaller ones for the more easy dispatch of business" and that the society's affairs be governed by a committee "to consist of delegates from each of the societies."⁷ As Skirving observed at a subsequent meeting, it was essential that such a plan be employed, for otherwise "Division [would be] equivalent to a dissolution."⁸ In the event this general meeting, which was to have been held on 5 September, was postponed and, despite a continuing increase in membership⁹, it was the end of September or early October before the proposed re-organisation took place. On 15 October

5. On 25 August "a considerable number" and on 28 August "a great number" of new members were admitted. "The Minute Book of the Edinburgh Society of the Friends of the People," 25 and 28 August 1792. Loc. cit.

6. Robert Watt to Henry Dundas, 31 August 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland), RH 2/4/64, ff302-304. This letter is printed in Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 1322-1324.

7. IBID.

8. "The Minute Book of the Edinburgh Society of the Friends of the People", 25 September 1792. Loc. cit.

9. The Minute Book records that, at a meeting on 11 September, the society "finding their numbers increased so much as to render an immediate organisation of the association necessary... agreed that they would take into their serious consideration a motion which had been made and seconded that a General Meeting should be called for this purpose". One week later the minute book recorded that the society "received a considerable number of new members" and "resumed the Question about calling a General Meeting". Loc. cit.

the editors of the Sheffield radical magazine 'The Patriot' wrote to Thomas Hardy, the secretary of the London Corresponding Society, stating that "several societies have been formed within the last three weeks in Edinburgh, not less than seven or eight" in number.¹⁰

Elsewhere in the east of Scotland radical societies were springing up. On 14 August 1792 a meeting of Perth reformers resolved to form a society of the Friends of the People,¹¹ and just over one month later it was reported that the society numbered "about one hundred divided into four societies."¹² In Dundee about forty radicals met together on 17 September 1792 to form a society of the Friends of the Constitution.¹³ In the west of Scotland too progress was being made. It is possible, although the evidence is not totally satisfactory, that the textile town of Paisley had as many as twelve reform societies

10. "Second Report from the Committee of Secrecy of the House of Commons respecting Seditious Practices". 6 June 1794. Appendix D. Parl. Hist, XXXI, 797. It has been claimed that the organisational structure of the Edinburgh Friends of the People was "based" on that of the London Corresponding Society. Meikle, op cit, 93. This is somewhat misleading. The Edinburgh radicals appear to have devised their own plan of organisation independently of the London Corresponding Society. As has already been noted a draft plan of organisation, substantially the same as that ultimately adopted, was presented to the Edinburgh society on 28 August 1792. The society did not receive a copy of the London Corresponding Society's address of 24 May 1792, which explained their internal organisational structure, until 19 September and the address was not read to the society until 25 September 1792. Robert Watt to Henry Dundas, 21 September 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland), RH 2/4/64, ff318-319. The Minute Book of the Edinburgh Society of the Friends of the People, 25 September 1792. Loc cit.

11. The Caledonian Mercury, 1 September 1792.

12. Robert Watt to Henry Dundas, 21 September 1792. Loc cit.

13. IBID and The Caledonian Mercury, 4 October 1792.

established by the end of August,¹⁴ while in Glasgow an unknown number of radical clubs had been formed during the summer of 1792. On 21 September Robert Watt, the spy, reported that although the Glasgow radicals had been "somewhat intimidated by the acc^t from France" of the September Massacres, "their present number is very considerable."¹⁵ As yet, however, neither the Paisley nor the Glasgow societies appear to have developed any central organisation. In both burghs, it seems, the radical clubs acted quite independently of each other.

By the end of September therefore a vibrant radical reform movement was beginning to emerge. The 'Caledonian Mercury' stated that "Societies are everywhere formed, and clubs instituted, for the sole purpose of political debate."¹⁶ This was a somewhat extravagant assessment. As yet the radical reform movement's power base was restricted to the cities and its numerical strength was limited. The great period of expansion belongs to the last quarter of 1792. Between October and December a vast number of radical societies were formed across Scotland, from Wick in the north to Wigton in the south and from Dunbar in the east

14. George Lynam, the spy, deposed at Thomas Hardy's trial that at a delegate meeting of the London Corresponding Society on 13 December 1792 it was reported that "there was a letter dated the 15th from Paisley, that they were willing to correspond with us - twelve societies formed in August for a parliamentary reform." Howell, State Trials, XXIV, 773. There must be some doubt concerning the accuracy of this evidence. It is difficult to understand why a letter presumably written on 15 November should refer to advances made by the society in August. It is perhaps more likely that the letter referred to developments in October or early November and that Lynam made a mistake in his note-taking.

15. Robert Watt to Henry Dundas, 21 September 1792. Loc cit.

16. The Caledonian Mercury, 30 September 1792. The rapid progress of the radical reform movement in Scotland impressed the English radicals. On 15 October the editors of the Sheffield 'Patriot' wrote to the London Corresponding Society stating - "We clearly foresee that Scotland will soon take the lead of this country." Loc cit.

to Dumbarton in the west, while in the more established urban strongholds of Glasgow, Paisley, Perth, and Edinburgh membership increased dramatically. Associated with the growing strength of radical organisation was an increasing popular "clamour" for reform which was signalled by a voracious plebian appetite for radical literature and expressed in "murmurs", hand-bills, and riots. When the Friends of the People met in Edinburgh in convention on 11 December 1792 they had, by any sober calculation, the backing of a sizeable proportion of the population.

The great expansionary phase in west of Scotland radicalism was sign-posted and, to some extent, stimulated by the formation, on 3 October 1792, at the Star Inn in Glasgow, of 'The Associated Friends of the Constitution and of the People'.¹⁷ It is probable that the associators' intention was, in part, to organise Glasgow radicalism by providing a forum at which various groups of radicals in different parts of the city could meet together, discuss matters of common concern, and agree on common policies. What is certain is that the association aimed "to preserve order" by piloting the movement towards the safe waters of moderation and constitutionalism,¹⁸ and to stimulate the expansion of the movement in the city and its environs. The inaugural meeting ordered

17. The Caledonian Mercury, 13 October 1792.

18. The association's regulations insisted that no new member was to be admitted without first having his "character" vouched for by at least one member of the committee and subscribing a declaration of loyalty to the constitution. "Resolutions and Plan of the Society of the Friends of the Constitution and of the People". Home Office Correspondence (Scotland), RH 2/4/64, ff371-372. See also 'The Glasgow Magazine', October 1795, 161.

the appointment of committees "in different districts" of the city "for the purpose of admitting Members". It was planned that, as membership increased, "separate Societies" were to be formed in the different localities. These "affiliated Societies" were "in every respect" to be "considered as branches of this one" and to send delegates "in proportion to their number" to any "General Convention" which might be called.¹⁹ The association's expectations of growth were fully justified. When the association held its third meeting on 17 October "about four hundred persons" were present, "of whom one hundred and twenty one were new members." Moreover, the meeting "established and confirmed a great many affiliated Societies, who presented themselves from various districts." Such indeed had been the rapid growth of the association in the first fortnight of its existence that the meeting decided that "It is no longer necessary for the Association to hold weekly general meetings in which all its Members are personally present", and, consequently, a meeting of delegates from the affiliated societies was called to discuss the future organisation of the association.²⁰ The leaders had planned that the affiliated societies, which were to consist of no more than thirty members each, should "present monthly a written report of their proceedings to the parent society."²¹ In the event the sheer number of societies which were either affiliated or desiring affiliation made the proposed organisational structure impracticable.²² Moreover the authoritarian nature of the proposed scheme may well have proved unacceptable to the

19. "Resolutions and Plan of the Society of the Friends of the Constitution and of the People." Loc cit.

20. The Glasgow Courier, 20 and 30 October 1792, and The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer, 15-19 October 1792.

21. The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer, 15-19 October 1792.

22. The Glasgow Courier, 24 November 1792.

membership. Thus when the association met at the Saracen's Head Hall on 21 November it resolved "That the different Societies which are now affiliated, shall henceforth be considered as independent; and that the Resolutions of each Society be regarded as the particular opinion of that Society." However, the central organisation which had been provided by the association was to be maintained. The meeting also resolved that the different societies "shall act with this one by sending Delegates to the weekly meetings to be held in this Hall."²³

By early December there were at least nine societies²⁴ in the city of Glasgow proper and three²⁵ in its immediate vicinity. Little is known about the size of their membership. James Smith, a Gorbals gunsmith, attended a meeting of the Gallowgate society on 28 November and claimed later that "four or five hundred persons" were present. Smith's veracity would seem to be borne out by the fact that, at the same interrogation, he frankly admitted that the inaugural meeting of the Partick society attracted only "about twenty persons."²⁶ However Smith's estimate of the numbers attending a meeting of the Gallowgate society is hard to square with the fact the society had met on 13 November in "the house of Mr. Allan, vintner."²⁷ Not many houses would be capable of holding as

23. IBID.

24. There were eight separate delegations from Glasgow to the 1st Convention; viz, from Glasgow (i.e. the Star Inn society), Balmanns Street, Calton, Candleriggs, Dovehill and Saltmarket, Gallowgate, Grinston's Tavern, and High Street. The Dovehill and Saltmarket delegation was a joint one from two normally separate societies, see 'The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer', 25-28 January 1793.

25. Namely, the Gorbals, Partick, and Anderston societies. A delegation from "Finnie" also attended the 1st Convention. I have been unable to locate Finnie, but it should be noted that the Glasgow district of Finnieston is known locally as "Finnie". It is therefore possible that "Finnie" may be Finnieston.

26. Declaration of James Smith, 8 December 1792. JC 26/281.

27. The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer, 19-23 November 1792.

many as five hundred people. The Grinston's Tavern society claimed, 4 December 1792, that the radical cause was supported by "thousands here",²⁸ but, aside from the fact that radicals notoriously exaggerated the number of their supporters when making public declarations, there is a world of difference between a support and a membership of thousands. A government memorandum on Glasgow radicalism, based on spies' reports and apparently drawn up in December 1792, stated that "The Reformers are computed at 1,200", although the author believed that "they probably amount to a far greater number."²⁹ This 'computed' figure is unlikely to be far wide of the mark. The expense of sending twelve delegates to the 1st Convention in Edinburgh could only be met by a substantial membership. Some of the delegates, notably Dalrymple of Fordell and George Crawford, were sufficiently well off not to require reimbursement for their expenses but others would not have been in such a happy position. In the later case transport, lodgings and living expenses would have to have been paid for by the societies. When one bears in mind both the low membership subscriptions of the societies³⁰ and the relative poverty of the membership³¹ it becomes clear that large sums of money could only be raised by a large membership. It is unlikely that the expense of such a size of delegation could be borne by a membership much under 1,200.

The last quarter of 1792 witnessed a remarkable increase in the strength of organised radicalism in the west of Scotland. In the immediate hinterland of Glasgow societies were formed in the "villages"

28. The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer, 3-7 December 1792.

29. Memorandum on Glasgow Radicalism. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) Supplementary. RH 2/4/209, f23.

30. The "Resolutions and Plan" of the Glasgow association laid down that "Upon subscribing our resolutions, each person shall pay Sixpence sterling. He shall also pay Threepence quarterly."

31. The Glasgow radicals, according to an informant, were "all low Tradesmen excepting Professor Millar and Mr. Muir." [?] Moncrieff to A. Maconochie, 12 October 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland), RH 2/4/64, ff367-370.

of Anderston and Partick on 17 and 22 November respectively.³² In Renfrewshire meanwhile the movement was entering into an exciting expansionary phase. The growing maturity and strength of Paisley radicalism was marked by a meeting of delegates from the different societies on 2 November at the Saracen's Head Inn.³³ Like their colleagues in Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Perth the Paisley radicals fully realised the benefits of an organisational structure which promoted strength through unity while preserving the independence of the individual societies. Thereafter, under the auspices of the "United Societies", Paisley radicalism flourished. A full-blooded 'Declaration' was distributed, savagely attacking the old regime and "the most idle and profligate orders of the community... our nobility and gentry,... murdering nabobs, and prostitute lawyers" who ran it, and declaring for universal manhood suffrage, annual elections, and secret ballots.³⁴ Moreover, despite the expense involved and the limited means of its individual members the Paisley United Societies sent a four man delegation to the 1st Convention.³⁵ By the end of the year Paisley had established itself as one of the strongholds of the Scottish radical reform movement. Elsewhere too in Renfrewshire radical societies were springing up. Lochwinnoch, Kilbarchan, and "two other societies" sent a delegate to the 1st Convention.³⁶ Of the two other societies referred to cryptically in the list of delegates one was almost certainly Johnstone³⁷ and the other was quite

32. The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer, 19-23 November and 23-26 November 1792.

33. The Glasgow Courier, 6 November 1792.

34. "A Declaration of Rights and an Address to the People. Approved by a number of the Friends of Reform in Paisley." Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH 2/4/65, ff145-153.

35. Meikle, op cit, 240.

36. IBID.

37. The minutes of the convention record the presence of a delegate from Johnstone who is not recorded in the list of delegates. Meikle, op cit, 256.

possibly Neilston.³⁸ In Ayrshire the movement grew rapidly, its growth being concentrated in the central district of Kyle. On 13 November "a number of inhabitants" of the textile and shoemaking town of Kilmarnock met together in the Angel Inn and formed themselves into "The Society of the Associated Friends of the People, and of Parliamentary Reform."³⁹ The society's growth was rapid and within a month it could boast seven societies (i.e. divisions) with a combined membership sufficient to finance a two man delegation to the 1st Convention.⁴⁰ A "Society of Reason, Liberty, and Right" was formed in the Ayrshire village of Galston on 12 November, while the month of December saw societies formed in the villages of Fenwick,⁴² Newmilns,⁴³ and Kilmaurs.⁴⁴ Moreover, by mid-December there were at least two societies in Kilwinning⁴⁵ and a "newly erected" society in Saltcoats.⁴⁶ Thus although Ayrshire was not

38. Although the earliest reference yet discovered to the Neilston society is dated 20 January 1793, this does not rule out the possibility that the society's history stretches farther back. It is relevant to note that the Neilston society co-operated with other Renfrewshire societies in jointly delegating representatives to the 2nd and 3rd Conventions. The Neilston, Paisley, and Johnstone societies jointly commissioned seven men to represent them at the 2nd Convention, while the Neilston, Kilbarchan, and Paisley societies jointly commissioned three men to the 3rd Convention. "Commission of the Paisley, Johnstone, and Neilston Societies", 25 April 1793, and the "Commission of the Paisley, Kilbarchan, and Neilston Societies", 26 October 1793. JC 26/280.

39. The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer, 16-19 November 1792.

40. Meikle, op cit, 240. By 19 December there were nine societies in Kilmarnock. 'The Edinburgh Gazetteer', 28 December 1792.

41. The Edinburgh Gazetteer, 7 December 1792.

42. The Edinburgh Gazetteer, 14 December 1792.

43. IBID.

44. IBID.

45. The Edinburgh Gazetteer, 28 December 1792.

46. On 11 December 1792 "A letter from Saltcoats was read congratulating the Convention, and mentioning that, though newly erected, the society consisted of 60 persons, but, being yet in its infancy, had appointed no delegates." Meikle, op cit, 241.

well represented at the 1st Convention (only Kilmarnock sent delegates), the radical reform movement had established a strong presence there by the end of 1792. Just across the border from Ayrshire the weaving village of Strathaven was beginning to earn its reputation for political radicalism,⁴⁷ while another Lanarkshire weaving centre, Hamilton, could also boast of its radical society.⁴⁸

In the area to the north of the Clyde a similar picture can be painted. The Kirkintilloch society of the Associated Friends of the Constitution and of the People was established on 3 November,⁴⁹ while in nearby Miltown and Lennoxton of Campsie societies were formed on 8 and 19 November respectively.⁵⁰ To the south-east of Campsie, in northern Lanarkshire, societies were established in Old Monklands parish and Airdrie in December 1792.⁵¹ In the same month the Renton society of the Friends of the People and the Dumbarton Friends of Universal Peace and Liberty met for the first time.⁵² In the central area dividing the cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh societies were formed at Stirling on or by 9 November⁵³, at Linlithgow on or by 30 November,⁵⁴ and at Shotts some time prior to 11 December.⁵⁵

47. Strathaven delegated William Aitken to the 1st Convention. Meikle, op cit, 240.

48. Hamilton delegated Joseph [John?] Miller, and Bailie Vanie to the 1st Convention. IBID.

49. The Caledonian Mercury, 10 November 1792.

50. The Glasgow Courier, 13 November 1792. The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer, 3-7 December 1792.

51. The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer, 24-28 December 1792. The Airdrie Society of the Friends of the People, "lately instituted in this place", met on 4 January 1793. 'The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer', 4-7 January 1793.

52. The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer, 17-20 December and 24-28 December 1792.

53. The Edinburgh Gazetteer, 16 November 1792.

54. The Edinburgh Gazetteer, 7 December 1792.

55. The Shotts society sent a delegate to the 1st Convention. Meikle, op cit, 240.

A similar story unfolds when attention is switched to the east of Scotland. By 2 November Robert Watt was reporting that the Edinburgh radicals "are now become formidable... in numbers, no less than thousands have united."⁵⁶ Watt's report seems to be reasonably accurate. A delegate meeting of the Edinburgh Friends of the People on 21 November was attended by "about 200",⁵⁷ a figure which, it might be noted, represented the total membership of the society in September 1792. Even allowing for a certain amount of exaggeration and for the fact that "visitors" were sometimes allowed to attend delegate meetings, it seems clear that such an attendance implied a total membership to be measured in thousands rather than hundreds. Moreover, that membership was still increasing. The next meeting of the delegates, on 28 November, decided that, "Mr. Lawrie's Room being found too small in consequence of the number of Delegates sent up,... the Convention should hold their next meeting in Bernard's Rooms."⁵⁸ In November also it was claimed that the Potterrow (Edinburgh) society had over seventy members and that membership was increasing weekly,⁵⁹ while the Canongate society had between four and five hundred members.⁶⁰ No evidence is available to confirm this last figure,

56. Robert Watt to H. Dundas, 2 November 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH 2/4/65, ff58-59.

57. Anonymous intelligence report. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH 2/4/65, ff60-61. Interestingly the same estimated attendance is given in 'The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer', 23-26 November 1792.

58. The Caledonian Mercury, 1 December 1792.

59. Declaration of James Purves. EUL. Laing MSS. add 7. No. 39.

60. Declaration of James Sanson. EUL. Laing MSS. add 7. No. 39.

but that the Canongate society had a large and rapidly increasing membership by November 1792 there can be no doubt. On 21 November a member of the society, a grocer named William Peddie, wrote to his cousin in Eyemouth (Berwickshire) stating that he had attended a meeting of the society the previous night at which "new Members were admitted as fast as they could subscribe their names."⁶¹ This rapid increase in numbers necessitated the division of the society into at least two new societies entitled Canongate No 1 and Canongate No2.⁶² In January 1793 the minute book of Canongate No 1 recorded a membership of two hundred and forty,⁶³ a figure which strongly suggests a membership of at least three hundred prior to the division of the society. Little is known of the membership figures of the other Edinburgh societies, but Canongate does seem to have had an exceptionally large membership. As has already been noted Potterrow had only about seventy members, while in January 1793 a member of the New Town society claimed that his society had one hundred and eighty members.⁶⁴ Such is the disparity in membership figures and the paucity of information relating to the subject that it is impossible

61. William Peddie to R. Purves, 21 November 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH 2/4/68, ff69-71.

62. It is possible that the original Canongate society had been divided into three in late 1792. Although there are no delegates from Canongate No 3 recorded in the list of delegates to the 1st Convention, it is interesting to note that Canongate No 3 was meeting in late February 1793. J.B. to [?], 1 March, 1793. In view of the declining attendances at the meetings of Canongate No 1 and No 2 in the early months of 1793 it is difficult to see why a third society should have been formed in this period. It is perhaps likely therefore that Canongate No 3 was formed in either November or December 1792.

63. J.B. to Patrick Moir, 9 January 1793. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH 2/4/68, ff 103-109.

64. IBID.

to give an accurate and precise figure for the total membership of the Edinburgh association of the Friends of the People. However, two things seem clear: first, the Edinburgh societies experienced a period of rapid growth in November 1792 and, second, the total membership was likely to be considerably in excess of 1,000.⁶⁵

The last quarter of 1792 saw the appearance of a number of radical societies in the hinterland round Edinburgh. On 2 November Robert Watt reported that a society had "just now" been established in Musselburgh,⁶⁶ while by 28 November a society had been formed at Dalkeith.⁶⁷ On 30 November a "Society of the Friends of Peace and the Natural Rights of Man" was formed at Penicuik,⁶⁸ while four days earlier a meeting of reformers from the East Lothian burgh of Dunbar and village of Belhaven resolved in favour of a "full, free and equal representation of the people in parliament."⁶⁹ All five of these societies were represented at the 1st Convention.⁷⁰

65. There were at least twelve societies meeting in Edinburgh in December 1792. Meikle, op cit, 239-241. 'The Glasgow Advertiser' calculated that in Edinburgh "the total number of the Members of these Associations cannot be less than between two and three thousand." The same newspaper added interestingly that "Edinburgh... is justly regarded as the focus of Scots Aristocracy. We are sufficiently assured that the Societies of this nature, in the west of Scotland,... contain, at least, forty thousand partizans." 'The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer, 23-26 November 1792.

66. Robert Watt to H. Dundas, 2 November 1792. Loc cit.

67. An undated intelligence report in the Home Office papers stated that at a meeting of the Glasgow delegate committee on 28 November 1792 "Letters were... read from the Societies at Dalkeith, Musselburgh, & at Cowgate." Home Office Correspondence(Scotland) RH 2/4/65, ff17-18.

68. The Edinburgh Gazetteer, 7 December 1792.

69. The Caledonian Mercury, 29 November 1792.

70. Meikle, op cit, 240-241.

Across the Forth November saw the formation of a society at Leslie. Only fourteen people attended the first meeting of the Leslie society,⁷¹ but "near one Hundred persons" were present at the first meeting of the Auchterderran society on an unknown date in late 1792.⁷² On 6 December a Society of the Friends of the People was formed in Dunfermline. The attendance of this inaugural meeting must have been immense for the society was divided into twelve districts each of which elected two or three delegates to the central committee which ran the club's affairs.⁷³ Elsewhere in Fife societies were established in Pathhead of Kirkcaldy, (where the membership increased rapidly and necessitated a division as in the Canongate society), Anstruther, and Auchtermuchty, all of which were named in a government memorandum, dateable to December 1792, as centres of radical activity in the county.⁷⁴

In Perth the membership of the Friends of the People "rapidly increased."⁷⁵ From a membership of one hundred divided into four societies in September the Perth Friends of the People numbered about 1,200⁷⁶ divided into nine societies by the end of the year. Such was the strength of Perth radicalism by the end of 1792 that it could finance a nine man delegation to the 1st Convention.⁷⁷ Only Glasgow, of the

71. John Jollie to William Skirving, 19 November 1792. JC 26/280.

72. Anonymous undated information to the Lord Advocate. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH 2/4/67, f479. This letter is found amongst material relating to December 1792 which strongly suggests that the Auchterderran society was formed around that time.

73. The Caledonian Mercury, 10 December 1792.

74. Memorandum on Fife radicalism. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) Supplementary RH 2/4/209, f18. Pathhead No 1 and No 2 sent a joint letter to the 1st Convention. Meikle, op cit, 241.

75. G. Penny, op cit, 67. Penny's account of the Perth radicals is extremely confused, (it was written over forty years after the events which it describes), and, while it is a useful biographical source, should be treated with great caution.

76 Anonymous undated information on Perth radicalism to the Lord Advocate. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland), RH 2/4/64, ff341-343.

77. Meikle, op cit, 240.

societies outwith Edinburgh, sent a larger delegation. Nothing much is known about the state of the radical movement in Dundee at this time. The Society of the Friends of the Constitution, as shall be seen, clearly enjoyed a considerable degree of support from the Dundonian community at large, but it must be doubted if the actual membership of the society was very large. Dundee sent only three delegates to the 1st Convention. Of these delegates, one, Thomas Muir, had already been delegated by another society. This practice of appointing delegates from other societies was frequently resorted to by societies whose membership were incapable of bearing the cost of sending their own. For example, the small society at Leslie in Fife commissioned William Skirving to act as their delegate to the 1st Convention.⁷⁸ As it is unlikely that the Dundee Friends of the Constitution contributed to the payment of Muir's expenses, it may be presumed that the membership could only afford to send a two-man delegation. If this was the case then it may be doubted if that membership exceeded three hundred at the time of the 1st Convention.⁷⁹

Organised radical politics established a foothold in Angus in the last three months of 1792. On 23 October a "Society of the Friends of the People for Constitutional Information and Reform" was formed at Montrose,⁸⁰ while on 1 and 5 December societies were established at Forfar and St. Cyrus respectively.⁸¹ December also saw a society of

78. John Jollie to William Skirving, 19 November 1792. Loc cit. See also Meikle, op cit, 240.

79. Nearby Perth with a total membership of 1,200 delegated nine men to the 1st Convention. Proportionately, therefore, 133 members sent one delegate. Similarly, if the Glasgow association's total membership was indeed around 1,200, then, with a twelve man delegation to the 1st Convention, the proportion of members to delegates works out at 100 : 1.

80. The Caledonian Mercury, 3 November 1792.

81. The Edinburgh Gazetteer, 7 December and 14 December 1792.

of the "Friends of Liberty and of the People" in Kincardine.⁸² Further still to the north a society appears to have been established in Aberdeen at some time prior to 11 December. Although no delegate from Aberdeen is listed in the commissions to the 1st Convention the minutes record his presence.⁸³ The Aberdeen society however led a shadowy existence; no further references to its existence have been discovered.

On the whole the north-east of Scotland was unfriendly towards political radicalism. The conservative tradition of that region which stretched back at least as far as the Reformation still exerted a powerful influence in the 1790s. Although there is some evidence of a radical presence in the north east⁸⁴ it was almost totally eclipsed by

82. The Edinburgh Gazetteer, 25 December 1792.

83. Meikle, op cit, 264.

84. As has been noted in the previous chapter a "Universal Liberty Club" was established at Portsoy in January 1792, but its career appears to have been cut short by the repressive activities of the local authorities in June 1792. No reference has been found testifying to its existence after that date. In nearby Banff the 'Edinburgh Gazetteer' was being read in June 1793, and some years later it was reported that "A few copies of Paine's Age of Reason" had been circulated in the burgh. Paine's work however, the parish minister assured his readers, "has done little harm." J.B. to William Scott, 16 June 1793. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland), RH2/4/70, ff255-256. OSA, XX, 378. The 'Edinburgh Gazetteer' was also read in Peterhead in 1793, but the town appears to have been otherwise unremarkable for radical activity. J.B. to William Scott, 16 June 1793. Loc cit. In November 1792 it was reported that a Tree of Liberty had been erected in Aberdeen, while in January 1793 it was stated that a "party" had gone to the Duke of Gordon's estate at Fochabers "and Erected a Tree of Liberty at his Grace's gate." Lord Provost George Auldjo to Lord Adam Gordon, 5 December 1792, and Kenneth Mackenzie to William Putteney, 3 January 1793. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland). RH2/4/66, ff235-236 and RH2/4/68, ff60-61. The evidence suggests that the north-east was not totally barren of radical politicians and sympathisers, but when it is taken in conjunction with the mass of evidence lying on the other side of the question it seems clear that the north-east was of all lowland regions in Scotland the least radical.

a violent conservatism exemplified by the Presbytery and Universities of Aberdeen. The Rev. George Mack of Peterculter parish (Aberdeenshire), for example, ran a close second to Dr. James Beattie of Marischal College in the virulence of his criticism of the French Revolution and its principles and in the passionate nature of his support for the constitution and the anti-radical policies of Pitt's administration. Such men could usually detect Scottish Jacobins where no-one else could, so it is revealing that both candidly conceded that no radical threat was apparent in their own region. Beattie commented, 10 January 1793, that "In this town [i.e. Aberdeen] and neighbourhood, and in all or most of the provinces to the northward of it, the generality of the people seem inclined to be quiet",⁸⁵ while Mack reported that Peterculter and its neighbourhood were untainted with radical heresy.⁸⁶ This assessment of the political situation in the north-east can be supported with a mass of other evidence.⁸⁷

If the north-east was unpromising territory the same could be said of the Highlands and Islands. Some quite astounding claims have been made about the contribution of the Highlands and the Highlanders to the democratic movement of the 1790s. James Young has

85. M. Forbes. "Beattie and his Friends" (Westminster, 1904), 275.

86. OSA, XVII, 406.

87. For example, the Rev. Robert Ballingall of Forglen parish (Banffshire) reported that his parishioners "are steady friends of Government... There are no murmurers here: No evil men seeking only rebellion. 'The King and the Constitution', or, 'The King, his Family, and Friends', are the toasts in the lesser, as well as in the greater circles". OSA, XIV, 545.

claimed that the communal working traditions of Highland life and the inheritance of a social outlook based upon the clan system made Highland 'peasants' sympathetic both to Paineite radicalism and primitive socialism,⁸⁸ while P. Beresford Ellis and S. MacA'Ghobhainn have argued that the societies of the Friends of the People "attracted a great number of Catholics from A'Ghàidhealtachd", who had been 'cleared' from their lands to make way for sheep farms.⁸⁹ If the Highland 'peasantry' were so sympathetic to Paineite radicalism it is surely more than passing strange that there is no record of any radical society operating in the Highland area in the 1790s. Moreover the news that the Highlands were a radical stronghold would have come as something of a surprise to the radical delegates in the British Convention who discussed the need to proselytise the Highlands and subscribed the sum of £5 4/- to assist in the proposed campaign of political education.⁹⁰ The argument that the radical reform movement of the 1790s was replete with displaced Highland catholics is fanciful. There is not one shred of evidence to substantiate the claim. Indeed by the end of the eighteenth

88. J. Young, op cit, 28.

89. P. Beresford Ellis and S. MacA'Ghobhainn. "The Scottish Insurrection of 1820". (London, 1970), 57-58.

90. On 27 November Archibald Wright, who was a Highlander himself, moved "That as ignorance is the great support of oppression, and knowledge its destruction, ... that this convention take some method of enlightening the Highlands of Scotland". The next day, after a debate in which Wright detailed some of the oppressions exercised by Highland landlords, the convention resolved "That this convention shall adopt some constitutional means of diffusing political knowledge in the Highlands of Scotland." A committee was appointed to consider how best this could be achieved and a subscription opened to finance the proposed propaganda. Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 432, 435-436, 459-460. The subscription raised the sum of £5 4/-. "Subscription Paper for the Instruction of the Highlanders" JC 26/280.

century such had been the success of the Church of Scotland's mission to the western Highlands and Islands that there were few Highland catholics left either to be displaced or recruited into a political movement.⁹¹

The destruction of traditional Highland society and culture in the second half of the eighteenth century left its victims confused, disturbed, and feeling betrayed by 'chiefs' "without pity for poor folk, without kindness to friends."⁹² The adaptation of "the dispirited and demoralised commons" to the new capitalist order imposed by their landlords was a slow and painful process.⁹³ Traditional Highland society based upon kinship was a stranger both to commercial landlordism and to the social antagonisms associated with it. Far from rendering the lower orders sympathetic to political radicalism the traditional values of Highland society "constituted the single most retarding influence [on the development of] a coherent critique of landlordism."⁹⁴ Thus, when the men of Strathrusdale and Kildonan, in 1792 and 1813 respectively, rose up to oppose the introduction of sheep farms they endeavoured to drive out not the landlords but the sheep and their shepherds. Indeed the men of Kildonan, in an extraordinary act of incomprehension, actually petitioned the Marchioness of Stafford for help.⁹⁵

91. W. Ferguson. "The Problems of the Established Church in the West Highlands and Islands in the Eighteenth Century" in "Records of the Scottish Church History Society", XVII, Pt 1, (1969), 30. The religious revolution in the Highlands was not however completed by the end of the century, many members of the Church of Scotland were merely nominal or at best lukewarm in their faith. The full triumph of presbyterianism in the Highlands and Islands belongs to the early nineteenth century. IBID, 30-31.

92. Quoted in J. Hunter "The Making of the Crofting Community" (Edinburgh, 1976), 14.

93. IBID, 14.

94. J. Hunter "The Emergence of the Crofting Community: The Religious Contribution 1798-1843" in "Scottish Studies", VOL 18, (1974), 97.

95. K.J. Logue, "Popular Disturbances," 67-73.

The Kildonan petition was perhaps more an expression of hope than expectation. That the old trust between tribal patriarch and clansman was breaking down was clear for all to see in the late eighteenth century. The Rev. Niel Douglas, who had been born in Bute and was a native Gaelic speaker, remarked of Argyll in 1797 that the "poor people... would not believe either their clergy or Gentlemen, ... having been so often deceived by fair promises" in the past. He commented that "It is an unhappy state of society, when the lower orders lose all confidence in the word of their superiors, and are apt to suspect every measure which they recommend."⁹⁶ This loss of confidence did not however lead to the radicalisation of the Highland tenantry. Prior to the Passenger Vessels Act of 1803 the typical response of the disgruntled Highlander to the 'improvements' inflicted upon him by his landlord was to take ship to the colonies or the USA. The Rev. Dr. John Macleod of Harris wrote to Sir James Grant of Grant on 21 October 1803 stating that the "Illiterate Highlanders... ancient attachment to their chiefs, & even to the Country, under a gloomy & general murmur of ideal oppression, is in a great measure dissolved by the universal rage for emigration to a foreign land."⁹⁷ To such people the attraction of America, "a Land of Freedom & Happiness",⁹⁸ seemed irresistible. The Highlanders responded to domestic oppression by emigrating and, when

96. N. Douglas. "Journal of a Mission to part of the Highlands of Scotland, in Summer and Harvest 1797, by appointment of the Relief Synod, in a series of Letters to a Friend; designed to shew the State of Religion in that Country, and the claim the inhabitants have on the compassion of fellow Christians." (Edinburgh, 1799), 102.

97. John Macleod to Sir James Grant of Grant, 21 October 1803. SR0. Seafield Muniments, GD 248/656, f9.

98. Donald McLean to Sir James Grant of Grant, 1 January 1803. SR0. Seafield Muniments, GD 248/656, f4.

that was made more difficult after 1803, by turning to an emotional form of evangelical religion.⁹⁹ The object was to escape either physically or emotionally from the cruelties of their landlords, not to combine politically to oppose landlordism. Such political action belonged to the second half of the nineteenth century, and not to the age of the French Revolution.

By the end of 1792 radical societies had been organised across a broad area of the country, which was bordered to the north by a line drawn diagonally from Kincardineshire to Dumbartonshire and to the south by one running from East Lothian to central Ayrshire. To the north of this area radical societies had been established in Aberdeen and Wick¹⁰⁰ by the end of 1792, but northern radicalism was a tender plant incapable of surviving either its relative physical isolation or the hostile political climate of the region. To the south of the main radical area radicalism had as yet, apparently, not made much organisational progress. That radical propaganda had reached into the Southern Uplands by late 1792 and that significant numbers of people had adopted radical views is clear,¹⁰¹ but organisationally the radical movement remained in an embryonic stage. The only society known to have been established in this region at this time was at Wigton, in the south

99. J. Hunter "The Emergence of the Crofting Community: The Religious Contribution 1798-1843" in Scottish Studies, VOL 18 (1974), 99-111.

100. A society of the Friends of the People was formed at Wick on 29 November 1792. 'The Edinburgh Gazetteer', 8 January 1793. It might also be noted that on 10 January 1793 the Trades of Thurso met to pass resolutions expressing both loyalty to the constitution and the need for "equal representation". 'The Edinburgh Gazetteer', 19 February 1793. Clearly, the radical reform movement had some measure of support in lowland Caithness.

101. For example, William Oliver, the Sheriff-depute of Roxburghshire, wrote to the Lord Advocate, 11 December 1792, stating that a "seditious paper" had recently been put up in Jedburgh and adding that "the late publications tending to inflame the minds of the People are in the hands of most of the lower Classes." NLS. Melville Papers. MSS 6, f46.

west, where a society of the Friends of the People had been formed on 3 December.¹⁰² Further eastwards in the Borders area the earliest references to radical clubs date to the spring of 1793.¹⁰³

If the objective of the Fortune's Tavern meeting was to stimulate the formation of a parliamentary reform movement which would attract support from all classes it failed. Generally speaking the bourgeoisie, the liberal professions, and the landed classes remained aloof from a movement which they viewed with distaste and, increasingly, alarm. Although "many individuals"¹⁰⁴ from the burgh reform movement joined the Friends of the People, a much greater number did not. The movement which grew up in the last few months of 1792 was essentially popular in character. Paradoxically many of its leaders were gentlemen both of property and of what Lord Justice Clerk Braxfield called "liberal education". In both Perth and Dundee the leaders of the movement were men of property and some social standing. A government memorandum on Dundee radicalism, dateable to December 1792 or early 1793, described five of the ten named leaders as "rich",¹⁰⁵ while in Perth the leaders of the movement were almost without exception

102. The Caledonian Mercury, 8 December 1792.

103. The earliest reference so far discovered to the Hawick "Society Instituted for Promoting Constitutional Reform" is to a meeting of the society on 15 April 1793 where resolutions were passed in favour of a "more compleat and adequate representation of the people" and triennial Parliaments. 'The Edinburgh Gazetteer', 19 April 1793. A Selkirk society may have been formed on or before 1 March 1793, on which day a meeting of a "considerable number" of the people of the burgh was held to pass resolutions in favour of petitioning the House of Commons for reform. 'The Edinburgh Gazetteer', 5 March 1793. The Selkirk society was undoubtedly formed by April 1793, see Joseph Smithson to William Skirving, 29 April 1793. JC 26/280. The Hawick, Selkirk, and Newton St. Boswells societies were represented at the 2nd Convention, 30 April-3 May 1793. Meikle, op cit, 274.

104. This claim was made by Muir at the 1st Convention. Meikle, op cit, 265.

105. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) Supplementary. RH 2/4/209, ff 12-13.

prominent figures in the local burgh reform movement¹⁰⁶ and "persons of some little respectability in the Town."¹⁰⁷ Moreover the national leadership, which was composed of men such as Lt. Col. William Dalrymple, Hugh Bell, Lord Daer, Thomas Fyshe Palmer, Thomas Muir, Captain William Johnston, and John Morthland, could hardly be described as the horny handed sons of toil. Nevertheless the social composition of the leadership did not reflect that of the movement which it led. As William Skirving put it:-

"The Friends of the People... generally speaking, are not men of respectability in the sense of the epithet which the weakness and prejudice of the human mind has appropriated to it. The greater number of them belong to the lower classes of citizens who have hitherto been non-entities in the political state."¹⁰⁸

These "non-entities" were drawn from a vast number and dazzling variety of occupations. Weavers, shoemakers, merchants,¹⁰⁹ tailors, bakers, grocers, tobaccoconists, hatters, upholsterers, joiners, cabinet-makers, painters, gardeners, leather merchants, saddle makers, clerks, hairdressers, booksellers, masons, school teachers, fencing masters, goldsmiths, smiths, students, dissenting clergymen, cotton spinners, printfield workers, brewers, distillers, watchmakers, instrument makers, apothecaries, reed makers, writers, farmers, and even a town drummer

106. For an account of the leaders of the Perth burgh reform movement see G. Penny, op cit, 66. For a list of the leaders of the Perth Friends of the People in late 1792 see Home Office Correspondence (Scotland), RH2/4/64, ff341-343.

107. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH2/4/64, ff341-343.

108. Draft "Address to the Public from the Friends of the People" in JC 26/280.

109. In late eighteenth century Scotland the term 'merchant' could be applied to virtually anyone who sold anything. "In Scotland every little retail shopkeeper is dignified with the title of merchant", "The Oxford English Dictionary", VOL 6, (Oxford, 1933), 347.

were to be found attending radical meetings.¹¹⁰

Like the sans-culottes, the democratic revolutionaries who had convulsed France in the revolution of 10 August 1792, the vast majority of the Scottish radicals were small master tradesmen, craftsmen, journeymen, and shopkeepers. In Edinburgh, it was claimed, "Seven Eights of those persons who join in these meetings are tradesmen", while in Glasgow, the same source added with some exaggeration, "they are wholly tradesmen."¹¹¹ In Perth the Friends of the People recruited chiefly among "shopkeepers of a very inferior order,"¹¹² operative weavers of which there are a vast number and... operative people in the various trades."¹¹³ This report from Perth gives a slightly misleading picture. Small masters, if not large employers, were as likely as journeymen "operatives" to join the radicals. In Edinburgh "many" of the radicals, it was reported, were "Members of Incorporations."¹¹⁴ In nearby Musselburgh the "Friends of Reform" met on 7 February 1793 and resolved "That the thanks of the society is due to the different incorporations of this place, for their manly behaviour in opposing the cause of corruption and supporting that of Reform",¹¹⁵ while in

110. This list is drawn from a wide variety of sources. The best single source is 'The Caledonian Mercury', 30 December 1793, which gives the occupations of a number of delegates to the British Convention. Also useful are the spies reports in the Home Office papers, the commissions of delegates to the various conventions which are to be found in JC 26/280, and the witness lists for the Scottish State Trials of 1793-1794 which are to be found in Howell, State Trials, XXXIII and XXIV.

111. James Mathison to William Pitt, 16 November 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH2/4/65, ff19-20.

112. David Smyth to Henry Dundas, 24 November 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH 2/4/65, ff86-87.

113. Anonymous undated information on Perth radicalism. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH2/4/64, ff341-343.

114. James Mathison to William Pitt, 16 November 1792. Loc cit.

115. The Edinburgh Gazetteer, 19 February 1793.

Kilmarnock the Incorporation of Shoemakers met on 28 December 1792 to pass resolutions in support of parliamentary reform.¹¹⁶

The shoemakers and even more so the weavers appear to have been the most radical of all occupational groups. In radical Kilmarnock, for example, it was the shoemakers and the weavers who were the most outspokenly militant. Following on the meeting of the Incorporation of Shoemakers, referred to above, a general meeting of Kilmarnock weavers, attended by "upwards of 300", was held on 2 February 1793 at which it was resolved that "every person who pays taxes has a right to a share in legislation himself or by his representatives."¹¹⁷ Nine days after this meeting the Journeymen Shoemakers of Kilmarnock met together to pass resolutions in favour of "equal representation."¹¹⁸ In Perth, George Penny recollected, the weavers and shoemakers were "the trades which chiefly distinguished themselves in these matters."¹¹⁹ The radical reputation of the weavers was well earned. In Strathaven, for example, the Incorporation of Weavers met on 31 December 1792 and declared for equal representation and shorter parliaments,¹²⁰ while in Campsie and Kirkintilloch "most of the members were young weavers."¹²¹

116. The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer, 14-18 January 1793.

117. The Edinburgh Gazetteer, 15 February 1793.

118. The Edinburgh Gazetteer, 19 February 1793.

119. G. Penny, op cit, 69.

120. The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer, 31 December 1792-4 January 1793.

121. Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 138. This was stated by Alexander Johnston, a bleacher in Kincaid Printfield, Campsie, who had attended the inaugural meeting of the Kirkintilloch society. It should be noted that in a radical edition of Muir's trial, published by Alexander Scott, the editor of the 'Edinburgh Gazetteer', a footnote has been inserted stating that "none of the persons, members of this society, who were examined as witnesses, seemed to be much below thirty." "The Trial of Thomas Muir, Esq. Younger of Huntershill; before the High Court of Justiciary, upon Friday and Saturday the 30th and 31st days of August 1793, on a charge of Sedition. The whole accurately taken down in short-hand. The Second Edition, enlarged and corrected. With an Elegant Portrait of Mr. Muir. To which is annexed, an Appendix; containing all the Papers referred to in the course of the Trial" (Edinburgh, 1793), 19. The radicals were anxious to dispel the idea that their societies were composed of young and immature people.

Moreover, it is surely not without significance that conservative propagandists frequently characterised the typical radical as a weaver. In 'Modern Politics', a loyalist pamphlet written in the form of a Socratic dialogue between the conservative "John Dunt" and the radical "Gibby Grunt", the author describes "Grunt", his archetypal radical, as "a Seceding weaver",¹²² while in 'Look Before Ye Loup' one of the radicals is named "Shuttle."¹²³

Other branches of the textile industry also produced recruits for the radical movement. As has already been noted the cotton mills were not the most promising of recruitment grounds for the Friends of the People. Nevertheless it is interesting to note that William Todd, a delegate from the Linktown of Kirkcaldy society to the 3rd Convention, was described as a journeyman cotton spinner,¹²⁴ and that James Ellis, the friend of T.F. Palmer, was similarly employed before moving to Dundee.¹²⁵ The fact that only William Todd of all the delegates to the four conventions can be positively identified as a cotton spinner is not necessarily proof that the cotton spinners stood aloof from the reform movement. In the first place evidence relating to the occupations of delegates is far from complete, and in the second place the work discipline of the cotton mill made it much more difficult for a cotton spinner than for a tradesman or craftsman to take the necessary time off to attend a political meeting in Edinburgh. It would have been asking a lot of any radical spinner to sacrifice his job to attend a

122. "Modern Politics, or, The Cat Let Out of the Pock. A Dialogue." (Edinburgh, 1793), 1.

123. "Look Before Ye Loup. Part Second: or Anither Box of Healin' Sa' for the Crackit Crowns of Country Politicians, by Tam Thrum, an Auld Weaver." (Edinburgh, 1794), 4. "Charlie Clod", one of the characters in the pamphlet, dismisses the radicals as a "tag-rag set of journeymen Weavers, Sutors an' Tailors." *IBID*, 7.

124. The Caledonian Mercury, 30 December 1793.

125. Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 314.

convention of the Friends of the People. It was much more convenient for cotton spinners to express their political opinions in their own localities. In this connection it is interesting to observe that radical societies were formed in cotton spinning areas such as Neilston. Without information about the social composition of such societies it is impossible to know whether cotton spinners were recruited or not. It is however a distinct possibility. That cotton spinners were not as politically docile as I.C. Smout, for example, has portrayed them¹²⁶ is strongly suggested by a letter from Lord Bute to William Adam, 3 November 1792, in which Bute writes that "Even in this sequestered spot will you believe that liberty and the rights of man are inscribed upon every door of the Cotton mill at Rothesay? This was the real case only three days ago: and the general conversation of the work people tend that way."¹²⁷

The radicalism of the printfield workers is more easily documented than that of the cotton spinners. The vice-president and the secretary of the Partick society of "The Sons of Liberty and the Friends of Man" were an apprentice linen printer and an apprentice print-cutter respectively.¹²⁸ In Campsie the radical societies obtained a large number of recruits from the Kincaid and Lennoxmill printfields. Six of those who gave evidence for the defence at Muir's trial were employed there.¹²⁹ One of the centres of the cotton printing industry was Levenside (Dumbartonshire) where the printfield workers were, by the early 1790s, beginning to establish a reputation for political and

126. I.C. Smout, *op cit*, 443.

127. Lord Bute to William Adam, 3 November 1792. Blair Adam Muniments. General Correspondence, 1792, A-Z.

128. Howell, *State Trials*, XXIII, 35.

129. J. Cameron. "The Parish of Campsie: a series of biographical, ecclesiastical, historical, genealogical, and industrial sketches and incidents". (Kirkintilloch, 1892), Appendix, p8.

industrial militancy.¹³⁰ A society of the Friends of the People was formed in Renton in December 1792, while a radical presence seems to have been established in Alexandria by late 1793.¹³¹ Moreover, when in December 1795 the "villages of Renton, Bonhill, Alexandria and their neighbourhood" petitioned the House of Commons against the 'Two Bills' and the French War, their petition had decidedly radical overtones.¹³²

There is little evidence that either the iron founders or the colliers of late eighteenth century Scotland were much involved in the radical reform movement. They seem, on the whole, to have remained aloof. Nevertheless, it is worthy of note that a radical society appears to have been established at Cleland Iron Works some time before December 1793¹³³ and that a society of United Scotsmen was functioning

130. OSA, III, 448. "For these two years past", the Rev. Gordon Stewart of Bonhill parish wrote in 1792, "there have been violent disputes between the masters and servants about the prices for the different pieces of work; the masters, on the one hand, endeavouring to reduce the prices, and to lower the wages to what they thought the trade could bear; and the servants, on the other, endeavouring to keep up the prices, and entering into those illegal combinations that are now become so common among the manufacturers of this country. Among other manouvres, they appointed a committee of their number, from the different printfields in the west of Scotland, to meet and to regulate the prices which they were to oblige their masters to give for the different pieces of work. They were to allow no persons to be employed but such as came under certain regulations which they had framed; and, that the number of hands might not increase too fast, the masters were not allowed to take in more apprentices than the operative servants thought proper. These measures obliged the masters to commence prosecutions, and to imprison some of their hands last summer; and a kind of compromise has been made between the masters and servants for a time."

131. "John Jones, Alexandria, Levenside" was named in a list of radical contacts drawn up by Skirving in late 1793. It is possible that Jones was an office holder in a local radical society. JC 26/280.

132. The petition stated that should the 'Two Bills' pass into law "we will no longer have Reason to exult in either our Freedom or Happiness, and yet, should any one have the temerity to call the Existence of these Blessings in Question, the unfortunate Enquirer will be subjected to the severest Penalties." "The Journals of the House of Commons", [I, 218.

133. "Jas. Gibson, Cleland Iron Works" was named in Skirving's list of radical contacts. JC 26/280.

in the coal mining and iron smelting village of Muirkirk (Ayrshire) in 1797.¹³⁴

Countless testimonies to the political conservatism of the tenant farmers can be adduced for this period. The Rev. James Lapslie stated that in his parish of Campsie the farmers "were remarkable for their loyalty and attachment to Government."¹³⁵ David Johnston, who owned "a good deal of property... in five parishes" in southern Fife, reported in December 1792 that "my tennents" are "all to a man good subjects",¹³⁶ while in Coupar-Angus a loyalist association was formed during the winter of 1792-1793 the members of which "are principally farmers."¹³⁷ The Sheriff-depute of Ayrshire claimed, in November 1792, that "in Airshire all factious meetings are very much dislik'd and disapproved of by the Gentlemen... and that the same is the case with the farmers and tenants."¹³⁸ The Dalkeith Farmers Society, which to some extent represented the farmers of Midlothian, met on 3 January 1793 and toasted "The King & Constitution", "Secretary Dundas", "Mr. Pitt", "May we have no Fox in our Folds or Greys among our Corn", "May we never have reason^{to reflect} with Pain on our Constitution", and "May our Patriotism neither depend on Price nor Priestly [sic] influence."¹³⁹ In

134. James Loudon McAdam to the Earl of Eglinton, 27 September 1797. EUL Laing MSS. Division II No. 500-501.

135. OSA, IV, 381.

136. David Johnston to Robert Dundas, 16 December 1792. EUL. Laing MSS. Division II. No. 500-501.

137. Anonymous undated information. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland), RH 2/4/64, ff341-343.

138. William Craig to Henry Dundas, 24 November 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland), RH2/4/65, ff82-83.

139. William Scott to R. Dundas, 4 January 1793. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland), RH2/4/68, ff64-65. The underlining is Scott's.

Dumfriesshire, Sir William Maxwell reported on 17 December 1792, "the farmers... seem desirous to adopt whatever measures may be recommended to them by their superiors for the protection of their lives and propertys,"¹⁴⁰ while in Roxburghshire the landed gentlemen found to their alarm in January 1793 that only "the principal Farmers" would sign the loyalist resolutions which were circulated round the parishes.¹⁴¹

In part this conservatism may have been owing to a sense of contentment which reflected the increasing material prosperity of the farming community in many, if not all, areas of the country in the later part of the eighteenth century. George Robertson, who chronicled the transformation of rural life in this period, observed that as a result of agricultural 'improvement'

"There was, indeed, in everything a more refined taste displayed, and which gradually improved, till in the end the simple establishment of the rustic husbandman came to emulate that of the more polished citizen of the capital: insomuch, that the gorgeous sideboard, the wine-cooler, the sofa or settee, and above all, the elegant piano-forte, not forgetting the carpets of the finest fabric, were now component parts of the furnishings of the farmers' mains."¹⁴²

Associated with this increasing prosperity¹⁴³ was a profound change in

140. Sir William Maxwell to the Duke of Buccleugh, 17 December 1792. The Buccleugh Muniments GD.224/31/19/7, f51.

141. John Rutherford to the Duke of Buccleugh, 29 January 1793. The Buccleugh Muniments GD.224/663/11, f7.

142. G. Robertson. "Rural Recollections; or, the progress of Improvement in Agriculture and Rural Affairs" (Irvine, 1829), 104-105.

143. It should be noted that the war-years, 1793-1815, saw a great expansion of the agricultural industry and a substantial increase in the farmers' standard of living. A.D. Gayer, W.W. Rostow, A.J. Schwartz. "The Growth and Fluctuation of the British Economy 1790-1850. An historical, statistical, and theoretical study of Britain's economic development", (Oxford, 1953), 37-38.

in social behaviour. The rural 'nouveaux riches' sought to imitate their lairds and to distance themselves socially from the lower orders. Alexander Wilson, the Paisley radical who worked as a packman (ie. a pedlar) in the Lothians, the show-piece of improved farming in this period, before returning to his former trade as a weaver, bitterly contrasted the rudeness of the inhabitants of "elegant farm houses" with the traditional hospitality of the poor cottager. The bourgeois farmers' haughtiness and snobbery Wilson ascribed to the "effects of pride and luxury."¹⁴⁴

Increasing wealth and social status did not always, however, produce politically conservative tenant farmers. The Marquis of Tweeddale reported that in East Lothian tenants "who have suddenly crept into wealth, by the long continued high price of corn have become purse proud and ambitious and have vainly conceived that they could discharge the duties of Representatives in Parliament, and of Justices of the Peace and the like offices... they have formed plans for having the right of election extended to them, and secondly, to prevent the rise of Rents, and to convert their temporary Leases into Feus."¹⁴⁵ The radicalism of the East Lothian farming community was no figment of an over-heated Tory imagination. On 14 July 1792 "a number of tenants and others in the neighbourhood" of East Linton met together to celebrate the French Revolution and to drink toasts to "The Constitution of France as now established", "An Equal Representation to the People of Great Britain", and "May every man who contributes to the support of Government fully

144. ed Rev. A.B. Grosart. "The Poems and Literary Prose of Alexander Wilson, the American Ornithologist". (Paisley, 1876), I, 11.

145. Inclosure in letter from the Marquis of Tweeddale to H. Dundas, 30 May 1794. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) Supplementary. RH2/4/208, ff759-762.

enjoy his Natural Rights, and elect his Representative."¹⁴⁶ The tenantry of East Lothian had good reason to want to break the political monopoly of their landlords. At a meeting of the farmers of East Lothian, at Haddington on 16 November 1792, it was resolved "That the Road Bill intended to be brought in next session of Parliament by the Gentlemen of this county is partial and oppressive:- Partial, because it subjects a number of tenants, from their local situations, to pay twice to the support of the roads; oppressive, because it lays additional burdens upon the county, while the statute labour that has hitherto supported these roads is meant to be continued." The meeting further resolved "That as the bye roads have been made principally by the tenants, every attempt to erect toll-bars upon these roads without the concurrence of the tenants, is impolitic and unjust" and "That as the tenants of the county bear nearly the whole burden of the bye-roads, they have an equitable and just right to a share in the management of them."¹⁴⁷

Nothing, unfortunately, is known about the social composition of the East Lothian radical societies, but it is likely that the tenant farmers constituted a significant proportion of their membership. What is certain is that John Hepburn "farmer at Barefoot" was delegated by the East Linton society to both the 3rd and the British Conventions,¹⁴⁸ and that he along with another East Lothian farmer named Walker were

146. The Caledonian Mercury, 28 July 1792.

147. The Caledonian Mercury, 19 November 1792.

148. Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 393. Hepburn was president of the East Linton society. IBID. Hepburn had presided over a meeting of the "inhabitants" of East Linton, 29 January 1793, which passed resolutions in support of parliamentary reform, the liberty of the press, and "an end to the War System." 'The Edinburgh Gazetteer', 8 February 1793.

arrested in January 1794 for their part in the radical demonstration which preceded Maurice Margarot's trial.¹⁴⁹ Besides Hepburn four other farmers have been identified as attending the last two conventions, viz. Thomas Boyd "farmer" of Caprickhall who was delegated by the Kilmarnock society to the 3rd Convention, William Skirving of Strathruddy (a farm in Fife near Lochgelly) who attended both conventions, William Marshall "farmer in Kettlestone" who was delegated by the Linlithgow society to the 3rd Convention, and William Martin "feuar in Muirryhall" who was delegated to the British Convention by the Shotts society.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, it might be noted that "John Wallace, Farmer, Haghouse by Fenwick" was the president of the Fenwick society in December 1792 and that both he and Archibald Prentice of "Covington Mains by Lanark", (an address which strongly suggests that Prentice was a farmer), were named in a list of radical contacts drawn up by Skirving in late 1793.¹⁵¹ Farmers are also recorded attending various public meetings which declared for reform. For example, in Ochiltree parish (Ayrshire) a meeting of "farmers and others", on 21 January 1793, decided that "several errors have crept into the government of this

149. R. to H. Dundas, [12 January? 1794] Home Office Correspondence (Scotland), RH2/4/74, ff76-78.

150. For Boyd, Marshall, and Martin's occupations see their respective commissions as delegates in JC26/280. For Skirving's tenancy of Strathruddy see P. Mackenzie "The Trial of William Skirving, with an original memoir and notes" (Glasgow, 1836), 3. and David Johnston to Robert Dundas, 16 December 1792, Loc cit. According to Mackenzie Skirving moved to Edinburgh in the spring of 1792. P. Mackenzie, op cit, 4.

151. Undated "List of Persons" in JC26/280. John Wallace is recorded as the preses of the Fenwick "Friends of Universal Liberty and Peace" meeting of 3 December 1792. 'The Edinburgh Gazetteer', 14 December 1792.

country" particularly "a proneness to wars, by which much blood hath been shed", the imposition of "many taxes", and "the rigorous exercise of Patronage", and declared "that a remedy for their grievances will be found in a more general extension of the right of election."¹⁵² A similar meeting of "farmers, tradesmen, and others" of the parishes of Melrose, St. Boswells, Bowden, Maxton, and Merton, held at Melrose on 15 February 1793 resolved to co-operate with the Friends of the People in petitioning parliament for reform.¹⁵³ It is impossible to calculate the total number of radical tenant farmers in this period, but it is possible to state that while these radicals were almost certainly a minority they were unlikely to have been an insubstantial one.

The apparent conservatism of some, perhaps many, tenant farmers in this period is an illusion. Tenant farmers were in the power, or at least under the influence, of their landlords who could decide not to renew the leases of political dissidents. Joseph Smithson of the Selkirk Friends of the People wrote to Skirving, 29 April 1793, explaining how the "country farmers" were under the "influence of the Nobility & Gentry". He stated that

"It is also true that many tenants in the neighbourhood during the course of last winter were in a manner compelled to sign what was called a constitutional resolution contrary to their sentiments. Indeed little or nothing else could be expected. There are certain embarrassments in life which make deep impressions on the virtuous & delicate mind...

When a tennant is reduced to the disagreeable necessity of

152. The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer, 25-28 January 1793.

153. The Edinburgh Gazetteer, 1 March 1793.

sacrificing his wish by a signature or of increasing the displeasure of his landlord by a refusal... If he be possessed of common sense it is natural to be supposed that of the two evils he will for the sake of his own interest verify the proverb [ie. sign to avoid offending his landlord]".¹⁵⁴

When it came to identifying dissident farmers landlords had the assistance not only of their factors but also, at least in some parts of the country, of the clergy of the Church of Scotland. "In the Country Parishes" of East Lothian "the Minister is the first man in pointing out the Reformers to their landlords and is by no means nice about his information."¹⁵⁵ That such information, "nice" or not, was acted upon there can be no reasonable doubt. In March 1799, for instance, Adam Ogilvie, one of the Duke of Buccleugh's factors, wrote to his employer stating that a family who had been "strongly suspected" of having played a prominent part in the Selkirk militia riot of 21 August 1797 were not to have their lease renewed and were to be thrown off the estate.¹⁵⁶ Open expression of dissident political opinions could cost tenant farmers and their families dear.

Even if tenant farmers were willing to risk incurring the wrath of their landlords by openly identifying with the radical reform cause, they still faced practical problems in giving expression to their political opinions. The poor state of communications in the Scottish countryside and the relative isolation of many farms (particularly in hill-farming areas) rendered the organisation of radical societies in

154. Joseph Smithson to William Skirving, 29 April 1793. JC26/280.

155. Andrew Taylor to William Skirving, 22 October 1793. JC26/280.

156. Adam Ogilvie to the Duke of Buccleugh, 11 September 1797. The Buccleugh Miniments GD 224/659/4, f5.

rural areas a fearfully difficult task. As Joseph Smithson explained to Skirving, "Many of the habitations of our well wishers in the country are situated in solitary places, the access to & fro is somewhat difficult on account of the [dirty?] roads, unfrequented paths, & stormy weather, inconveniences very common to a mountainous country like ours. On which account such persons have been mostly deprived of the knowledge of our proceedings by reason of the commencement being in the winter season."¹⁵⁷

All in all the lack of mass support for the radical reform movement in the countryside can not be taken without question as an expression of ingrained rural conservatism. That many farmers were indeed deeply conservative is perhaps probable, but there must be some element of doubt as to whether the refusal of some tenant farmers to involve themselves in the reform movement signifies anything more than a recognition of the power of their landlords to punish wayward political behaviour. Indeed the wonder is not that there was no mass support for the radicals, but that there was any support at all. Not only were there formidable organisational problems to be overcome, but the very act of organisation itself involved the radical farmer in serious danger. The farmers who attended public meetings to declare for reform and, even more so, those who joined radical societies acted bravely at some risk to the future welfare of themselves and their families. It is possible that rural Scotland harboured a significant number of 'closet' radicals.

The radical reform movement drew no support whatever from the farm servants or from the general labourers. George Robertson observed of the farm servants of Midlothian in 1793 that "it is astonishing how little credit they give to the writings of that jack-a-lantern Paine,

157. Joseph Smithson to William Skirving, 29 April 1793. Loc cit.

and his bewildered followers" and commented favourably on their "pacific disposition."¹⁵⁸ The farm servants and general labourers remained politically impassive throughout the 1790s, neither siding with the radicals nor actively supporting the defenders of the constitution. There were neither radical labourers nor Church and King labourers. This apparent political apathy was of no account to the conservatives who expected such men to pay no attention to politics, a subject which it was believed was beyond both their intellectual capacities and their legitimate interest, but it was a serious set-back to the radicals who needed all the popular support they could get. To radical artisans like Alexander Wilson the labourers constituted a class apart. He sympathised with them, but was perplexed and disgusted by their "spiritless resignation to their drudgeries and mean servitude." Of the farm servants of Midlothian he commented:- "Almost unconscious that they were born for any thing, but to be perpetual servants, from father to son and from mother to daughter, they struggle with want, and rear up their offspring in the service of their insolent superiors."¹⁵⁹ In part, no doubt, this apathy and "spiritless resignation" were owing to the traditional deference of the labouring classes, but in part also it reflected the fact that the radicalism of the day was perceived as offering little to the labourer. Radical policies were designed by and for the 'sans-culottes'; they had no appeal to the labouring masses.

The political programme of the Friends of the People offered the labouring poor no relief from the ruthless exploitation of their employers and the grim poverty of their lives. Property rights, both Thomas Paine and the radical clubs argued, were inviolable. The Edinburgh Friends of the People issued a Declaration on 5 December 1792

158. G. Robertson. "General View of the Agriculture of the County of Midlothian with observations on the means of its improvement." (Edinburgh, 1793), 27.

159. ed. Rev. A.B. Grosart, op cit, I, 26.

stating that "Their object is to reform, and not to subvert the order of Society. To give security to property... and not violate it themselves by the public robbery of an equal division."¹⁶⁰ Exactly one week later the 1st Convention issued its own Declaration stating that the Convention

"Taking into consideration the insidious, wicked, and inflammatory artifices employed by the enemies of all Reform to misrepresent and calumniate the Friends of the People, as the... advocates of an unjust and absurd violation of private property by an equal division - think it incumbent upon them to declare, that they hold all such unprincipled designs in utter detestation and abhorrence."¹⁶¹

An essay entitled "Equality" was published in a number of Scottish newspapers in December 1792 defending the radical reformers against the charge of economic "levelling", explaining what they meant by "equality", and outlining their views on property rights. The essay stated that

"The Equality insisted upon by the Friends of Reform is an Equality of Rights or, in other words, that every person may be equally entitled to the protection and benefit of society: may equally have a voice in the election of those who make the laws by which he is affected in his liberty, his life, or his property: and may have a fair opportunity of exerting to advantage any talents he may possess. The rule is not 'Let all mankind be perpetually equal', - God and nature has [sic] forbidden it. But, 'Let all mankind start fair in the

160. The Caledonian Mercury, 6 December 1792.

161. The Caledonian Mercury, 15 December 1792.

race of life'. The inequality derived from labour and successful enterprise, the result of superior industry and good fortune is an inequality essential to the very existence of society; and it naturally follows that the property so acquired should pass from father to son. To render property insecure would destroy all motives to exertion and tear up public happiness by the roots."¹⁶²

There is no reason to disbelieve these declarations or the vast number of other public pronouncements to the same point which could also be produced in evidence.¹⁶³ The artisans and shopkeepers who composed the bulk of the membership of the radical reform movement were after all men of some property themselves. As men who either owned or expected in time to own their own houses, workshops, stock, and work-tools they had no incentive to mount a wholesale attack on property rights. Property to such men was not theft, but the legitimate reward of "labour and successful enterprise".

The spate of radical declarations and resolutions denying any intention of interfering with property rights which poured off the press

162. The Glasgow Courier, 25 December 1792. This essay was also published in 'The Edinburgh Gazetteer', 14 December 1792, and 'The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer', 24-28 December 1792.

163. For example the Incorporation of Weavers in Strathaven resolved, 31 December 1792, "That an equality of representation, and not of property, as is falsely asserted, is the just and unfeigned design of the Friends of the People, else why so many noblemen and gentlemen of landed property.. who glory in the honourable appellation of the Friends of the People." 'The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer', 31 December 1792 - 4 January 1793. The Portsburgh Society of the Friends of the People resolved, 18 December 1792, "that the man who has asserted that the people of Scotland propose an Agrarian Law, or an equal division of property, is a foul calumniator of his country." 'The Caledonian Mercury', 22 December 1792.

in late 1792 were a direct answer to the charges levelled against the reformers by their conservative opponents. The conservative literature of the day is replete with accusations that the radicals were intent upon economic levelling, and even explicit denials failed to convince the conservative mind that such was not intended. Faced with denials the conservatives accused the radicals of lying. The Friends of the People, a loyalist pamphleteer wrote in 1792, might "in their public proceedings... disclaim the idea of an equality in property", but they "secretly allow" their supporters "to entertain the idea."¹⁶⁴

The conservatism of the day refused to accept radical denials at face value because it equated political rights with the ownership of property. To the conservative mind the advocacy of political equality necessarily implied the advocacy, secret or otherwise, of economic equality. The idea of a democracy existing side by side with great economic and social inequalities was, quite literally, incomprehensible to conservatives. In their eyes democracy directly threatened the social hierarchy and the security of property.

Political and social inequality, conservative writers argued, reflected the inequalities of property, which in turn reflected the innate inequality of man. To claim that all men were equal and had equal political rights was to challenge the fundamental principles on which British society and government were based. "The distinction of ranks", the Rev. Dr. Thomas Hardy (1748-1798), a leading Moderate clergyman and Professor of Ecclesiastical History in the University of Edinburgh, explained, was "founded on the possession of wealth in all different degrees... All men cannot be equal, but in a state of

164. Anon. "A Serious Expostulation with the Lower Orders of the People" (Edinburgh, 1792), 8.

universal poverty and misery."¹⁶⁵ Thus, to propose, as did the radicals, that all civil distinctions based upon property be abolished was to upset the very basis of society. Moreover, to further propose that all men, irrespective of wealth and social status, should have equal political rights was to attack the fundamental principles of the constitution and threaten the security of property. John Young, the Antiburgher minister of Hawick and loyalist writer, argued that, as one of the main responsibilities of Parliament was to pass laws respecting property, "reason dictates, that every man's influence should be in proportion to the property he possesses. And as land is the most fixed kind of property, and the radical source of national wealth, it is highly reasonable, that landholders should have a principal concern in the making of such laws."¹⁶⁶ Property, it was argued, was only secure if the franchise was vested exclusively in the hands of large property owners. As the Rev. Dr. Hardy put it:

"power without property is the very engine of plunder, and lets loose those hands which good laws are meant to restrain. Even suffrage extended beyond those bounds which mark a solid interest in the established order of society, would be quickly and fatally followed up by levelling and destruction. To the men of rank and property the country looks up with confidence, as to the only safe depositaries of civil influence, and of the elective franchise."¹⁶⁷

165. T. Hardy. "Fidelity to the British Constitution, the Duty and Interest of the People. A Sermon, preached in the New North Church, Edinburgh, on Thursday, February 27, 1794, being the day appointed by His Majesty for a General Fast." (Edinburgh, 1794), 26-27.

166. J. Young, op cit, 84.

167. T. Hardy "The Importance of Religion to National Prosperity. A Sermon, preached in the High Church of Edinburgh, May 15, 1794, at the opening of The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland." (Edinburgh, 1794), 24-25.

In the conservative mind property and political rights were so integrally connected that it was argued that political equality was impossible without economic equality. John Young, who followed this line of argument, illustrated the thesis with the case of the poor man without tenants or dependants and his rich neighbour "attended with 500 tenants, and dependants, who all know that he can turn them out from their farms or places, if they do not vote as he does." Clearly, Young argued, the two men could not be politically equal.¹⁶⁸

This theoretical view of democracy rather than any special knowledge of radical policies and plans lay behind the continual accusations of economic levelling. Moreover, it seemed to many defenders of the old regime that theory had been substantiated by experience. In revolutionary France, they noted, the progress of democratic principles went hand in hand with anarchy and the spoliation of property. The Rev. Dr. Hardy offered his congregation and readership a definition of a "Democratical Republic" based upon his understanding of revolutionary France. A "Democratical Republic" was, he stated, "the government of criminals and profligates over the rest of the community, for the purposes of plunder and destruction." In contemporary France, he pointed out, "The people have risen up in a phrenzy; they have relinquished justice... they have made property the subject of pillage; they have levelled all ranks in the dust."¹⁶⁹ France proved, Hardy and like minds argued, what the radicals denied; the object of international democratic radicalism was to introduce anarchy and to invade property rights.

168. J. Young, op cit, 117.

169. I. Hardy, "Fidelity to the British Constitution", 30-31.

Conservative accusations were also backed up by reports from various parts of Scotland that the lower orders were talking of dividing up the property of the rich. Sir William Maxwell wrote to the Duke of Buccleuch, in November 1792, stating that "Emissaries of sedition" had been at work among "the lower classes of the People" convincing them that by "uniting & resisting the oppressive measures of the great, they will infallibly obtain justice, freedom, equality, & a division of landed property."¹⁷⁰ Less than two months later a "shepherd" in Dumfriesshire reported that "the poorer class of people" harboured "vain thoughts purposing to shake of the yoke of government as in France and divide the landed property amongst them."¹⁷¹ It was reported from Kirriemuir, in November 1792, that "an opinion got among the lowest class that a division of property should... take place, and that they would [be?] equally free and equally rich."¹⁷² Such reports greatly increased the alarm of government and the propertied classes, but there must be some doubt as to whether they accurately represented the opinions of the lower orders. Close examination of the documents concerned reveals that such reports are something less than satisfactory evidence. James Mitchell, the Kirriemuir correspondent, reported that he had gone among the radicals extolling the idea of a division of property and that "by playing off this notion I have made some of the hottest people here as great enemies to Revolution principles (on the new plan), as ever they were friends to them."¹⁷³ Clearly, the

170. Sir William Maxwell to the Duke of Buccleugh, 19 November 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH2/4/65, ff54-57.

171. Anonymous to Lord Grenville, 8 January 1793. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH2/4/68, ff100-101.

172. James Mitchell to [H. Dundas?], 29 November 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH2/4/65, ff158-159.

173. IBID.

Kirriemuir radicals were as alarmed by the idea of economic levelling as Mitchell himself. The Dumfriesshire shepherd's accuracy is called in question by the fact that he affirmed that the agents of "French principles" in the county were Roman Catholic priests, while Maxwell's report seems to be based more on his assessment of the mental capacity of those whom he termed "the ignorant multitude" than on any reliable information. "Scots peasants", Maxwell explained, "understand nothing of parliamentary reform, equal representation, and the other grievances of which the discontented in a higher rank of life complain, [but] they may be tempted to unite, to try their strength and risque their necks, in the hopes of bringing about a division of the landed property."¹⁷⁴ Maxwell's assessment of how radical sloganising about "equality" was understood by the "ignorant multitude" was apparently widely shared. The Rev. Dr. Thomas Somerville, for example, believed that the depredations of the peasantry in revolutionary France were to be understood in Maxwellian Terms. "Equality", he wrote, "had been much talked of; and it was natural for them to understand the word in the most obvious sense, and in the utmost latitude of interpretation."¹⁷⁵ It is possible that some people did indeed misunderstand what the radicals meant by equality, but there is no reliable evidence to suggest that their numbers were ever substantial. If significant numbers of the "lowest class" were indeed proto-socialist in their outlook it is remarkable that the only contemporaries to discover and comment upon the fact were alarmist and unreliable conservatives.

174. Loc cit.

175. T. Somerville. "The Effects of the French Revolution, with respect to the interests of Humanity, Liberty, Religion, and Morality." (Edinburgh, 1793), 28.

There was however a strand of radical thought which gave some credibility to the loyalists' accusations. Alexander Wilson's observations of life under the 'new' agriculture in Lothian convinced him that the capitalist farming system produced undesirable economic inequalities. He argued that Lothian farms, which had been "portioned out in large tracts", should be divided into smaller units "by which means, the extremities of want and luxury would be equally avoided, the poor put on a footing to do something for themselves and offspring, and the country more honestly supplied with its product, than it is at the present day."¹⁷⁶ Artisans like Wilson were repelled both by the great economic inequalities of contemporary life and by the demeaning "dependence" of the labouring masses. They sought to lessen these inequalities and make the mass of the people more "independent". The farm servants were to be transformed into small independent producers - "put on a footing to do something for themselves" - and thus freed from the poverty, exploitation and humiliating subservience that was their lot under "improvement". In short they were to become yeomen farmers, the agrarian equivalents of the artisans themselves.

It is difficult to say how much support such ideas had within the radical movement. Certainly Wilson was not alone in advocating them. Both in England¹⁷⁷ and Ireland¹⁷⁸ some radicals came to argue along

176. Rev. A.B. Grosart, op cit, I, 26-27. It should be noted that Wilson was opposed to an equality of property. Economic equality was, he argued, a natural absurdity and would not last long even if it was imposed, because "Some would be more indolent, some more extravagant, others more industrious, careful, or enterprising, than the rest, and the property of these would increase or diminish accordingly." IBID, 325.

177. For example, John Thelwall of the London Corresponding Society who "took Jacobinism to the borders of Socialism." For a discussion of his ideas see E.P. Thompson. "The Making of the English Working Class." (Pelican edn, 1974), 175.

178. R.B. McDowell, op cit, 377-378.

similar lines, while in Scotland there are suggestions that at least as far as some radicals were concerned not all forms of property were inviolable. Thomas Wilson, a Strathmiglo (Fife) weaver, who had worked as a shearer on the farm of John Miller during the harvest of 1800, was charged with sedition at the Perth Circuit Court on 7 September 1802. It was alleged that Wilson had expressed the wish "that the overthrow of the British Constitution might take place and hoped that the said John Miller would see it, and that he the said Thomas Wilson and his associates would then be the proprietors of the said John Miller his farm."¹⁷⁹ Wilson was found guilty and sentenced to one month's imprisonment to be followed by a banishment of two years furth of Scotland. However the paucity of such evidence suggests that the policy of land redistribution had very limited support.

Poverty, the vast majority of the radicals believed, was not caused by the inequitable distribution of property but by the system of Government in Britain. "The hordes of miserable poor, with which old countries abound", Paine argued, were "the consequence of what in such countries is called government."¹⁸⁰ Paine stated that poverty was caused by the vast expense of maintaining monarchy and the "outworks" of corruption which surrounded it. A system of government, he argued, that forced thousands who "are pining with want, and struggling with misery" to contribute by means of their taxes to the upkeep of monarchy, court pensioners, sinecurists, and placemen, (those whom Paine termed "a band

179. Criminal Letters: H.M. Advocate agst Thomas Wilson, 1802. JC26/313. This case is discussed in H. Cockburn. "An Examination of the Trials for Sedition which have hitherto occurred in Scotland". (Edinburgh, 1888), II, 168-170.

180. T. Paine. "Rights of Man. Part the Second combining Principle and Practice". (5th edn, London, 1792), 3.

of parasites, living in luxurious indolence, out of the public taxes"), was inhuman.¹⁸¹ "Government", he stated, "does not consist in a contrast between prisons and palaces, between poverty and pomp; it is not instituted to rob the needy of his mite, and increase the wretchedness of the wretched."¹⁸² There was, he stated, no greater abuse of government "than that of quartering a man and his heirs upon the public to be maintained at its expense."¹⁸³

Paine's arguments struck a ready chord in Scotland, although the Scottish radicals were wary of openly identifying with his vigorous republicanism. The inaugural meeting of the Anderston Friends of the Constitution and of the People resolved "that the enormous load of taxes with which the people of this country are at present oppressed, is in consequence of the unequal manner they are represented in Parliament",¹⁸⁴ while the prospectus of the 'Edinburgh Gazetteer' declared that in Britain, "where the bread of the poor and the rewards of industry are devoured by an immense taxation, every individual has a right to consider himself as a proprietor in the government, and to inquire into the measures on which his property is expended."¹⁸⁵ The Glasgow Friends of the Constitution and of the People issued an address on 3 December 1792 which complained that "the heavy and enormous taxes which cramp our manufactures and fetter our trade, are not sensibly diminished after

181. IBID, 68-69.

182. IBID, 68.

183. IBID, 70.

184. The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer, 23-26 November 1792.

185. The Edinburgh Gazetteer, 16 November 1792.

nearly ten years of profound peace", argued that taxes "particularly the salt and coal duties, those on soap, candles, leather, farmers' horses, the additional excise on porter and strong beer &c" might be reduced, and declared that when they considered the "wasteful prodigality of public treasure, in unnecessary armaments, immense pensions to the rich, vast unmerited salaries, and useless sinecures, we cannot help being fully convinced that nothing can either put an end to this system of taxation and profusion... but a full, fair and equal representation of the people, from whom these supplies are exacted."¹⁸⁶ George Home wrote to Patrick Home of Wedderburn reporting that, at a meeting of the Edinburgh Friends of the People on 21 November 1792, "The Laird of Macleod M.P. got up and... read the names of all the different officers about the Court, their appointments and Employments, Interspersed with Commentaries suited to the occasion and to show how the poor tradesmen manufacturers and Labourers were oppressed with Taxes to Support the Pageantry of a Court." He added that "You cannot conceive what effect the diffusion of these Ideas has among the Common People."¹⁸⁷

The linking together of economic with political issues was hardly new. Bourgeois radicals had long stressed how the exclusion of the burgesses from the political process hindered economic development and how the extension of political rights to the middling ranks would produce material benefits. Moreover, as Macleod's speech illustrates,

186. The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer, 30 November-3 December 1792.

187. George Home to Patrick Home of Wedderburn, 25 November 1792. SR0. Home of Wedderburn MSS. GD267/1/16. Macleod wrote in 1794 that "I do therefore plainly assert that the British Constitution has nothing to fear from the establishment, or the invasion of the Republic of France, nor from the promulgation of the doctrines of liberty throughout Europe, but it may fear its own downfall from enormous taxation, and an intolerable national debt." N. Macleod. "Considerations on False and Real Alarms. By Colonel Norman Macleod, M.P. Dedicated with Sincere and Affectionate Respect to the Earl of Lauderdale." (London, 1794), 22-23.

even the Foxite Whigs incorporated economic arguments in their critique of the Old Regime. What was novel, was that for the first time a sizeable number of the lower orders were beginning to link their economic grievances with their exclusion from representative politics and to believe that their standard of living would be improved as a result of obtaining a democratically elected House of Commons. This 'political awakening' was largely owing to the impact of Paine's 'Rights of Man'. Sir William Maxwell, having reported that "Emissaries of sedition" had been at work in Dumfriesshire convincing the people that taxes were only levied to support royal luxury and extravagance added that "Paine's pamphlet, or the cream and substance of it, is now in the hands of almost every country man, and which they purchase at so low a price as two pence."¹⁸⁸

If the Proclamation of May 1792 stimulated interest in the 'Rights of Man' the last quarter of 1792 witnessed a phenomenal increase in that interest and a corresponding increase in the availability of the work at a price which the bulk of the population could afford. Such was the avidity with which the 'Rights of Man' was read in that period of mounting political excitement that John Clerk of Eldin declared - "I believe no book ever had such a rapid circulation."¹⁸⁹ Across the length and breadth of the country Paine's great work was read, digested, and critically assessed. Maxwell's report on the situation in Dumfriesshire was confirmed by Adam Ogilvie who informed the Duke of Buccleugh that "there has been a very large importation & great demand of Paine's abridgment, and the common people are wonderfully agog about

188. Sir William Maxwell to the Duke of Buccleugh, 19 November 1792. Loc cit.

189. Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 344.

reformation."¹⁹⁰ Indeed such was the impact of Paine in the south-west that Robert Burns observed that "even children lisp the Rights of Man."¹⁹¹ In Glasgow it was reported that "the works of Master Thomas Paine were universally read: and to assist the political studies of the poor, abridgements and excerpts of the works of the Great Reformer of Nations were assiduously circulated,"¹⁹² while in nearby Paisley, Alexander Wilson stated,

"The 'Rights of Man' is now weel kenned,

And read by mony a hunder."¹⁹³

In Kirriemuir the "demand for Pain's writings" had become so "universal" by November 1792 as to necessitate the importation of "a great number of the cheap edition", with the result that "These inflammatory writings were soon in the hands of almost every person who could read."¹⁹⁴ In the agricultural parish of Fossaway and Tulliebole, which straddled Perthshire and Kinross-shire, it was reported that, "Few, except the gentlemen, conversed much about political affairs, till the works of Thomas Paine appeared. Since that time, the people converse more frequently on those topics."¹⁹⁵ As has been noted, radicalism had little appeal in the Highlands and Islands, but even there, it seems, Paine's work made some impact. By November 1792, it appears the

190. Adam Ogilvie to the Duke of Buccleugh, 16 December 1792. The Buccleugh Muniments GD 224/659/3, f66.

191. eds. W.E. Henley and T.F. Henderson, op cit, II, 150. The quotation is taken from the poem 'The Rights of Women, spoken by Miss Fontenelle on her benefit night, November 26, 1792'.

192. R. Heron, op cit, II, 419-420.

193. Rev. A.B. Grosart, op cit, II, 73.

194. James Mitchell to [H. Dundas?], 29 November 1792. Loc cit.

195. OSA, XVIII, 456.

'Rights of Man' had been translated into Gaelic and was circulating in parts of the Highlands.¹⁹⁶ By April 1793 it was reported that "Paine's book, and others of the same stamp" were to be found in Stornoway,¹⁹⁷ while in Inverness it was claimed that "Pain's Book... has been very industriously circulated among the lower class of our people & its damnable doctrines eagerly embraced by them."¹⁹⁸ The contagion spread as far north as Shetland where "inflammatory papers and Pamphlets" were said to have appeared during the winter of 1792-1793. However the 'clergy, landholders, merchants, and other gentlemen" of the county were happy to announce that "they met with the contempt they so justly merit."¹⁹⁹

The 'Rights of Man' played a central, and probably crucial, role in politicising the 'lower orders' in late 1792 and in providing the radicals with an ideological handbook. It was the bible of Scottish radicalism, but it was a bible in which some of the contents were more acceptable than others. When the Scottish Friends of the People drew up their political creed they were highly selective about which of Paine's ideas they adopted as their own.

196. Lord Spencer wrote to Lord Auckland, 26 November 1792, stating that "Mackintosh, who is just returned from a Tour in the Highlands of Scotland, and who, by the bye, is much altered in his principles, assured several persons at Oxford that he found Paine's book, translated into Erse, in the hands of all the common people." ed The Bishop of Bath and Wells. "The Journal and Correspondence of William, Lord Auckland. With a Preface and Introduction by the Right Hon and Right Rev The Bishop of Bath and Wells." II, (London, 1861), 469.

197. Extract from a letter from Col. Humberston Mackenzie of Seaforth to Lord Adam Gordon, 27 April 1793. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) Supplementary. RH2/4/207, ff465-467.

198. Baillies of Inverness to Hector Munro, 9 April 1793. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH 2/4/70, ff175-178.

199. Resolutions of a "Respectable meeting of the clergy, landholders, merchants and other gentlemen of Shetland". Lerwick, 19 February 1793. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland), RH 2/4/70, ff129-130.

As we have seen the Scots radicals shared Paine's views on the cause of poverty. Moreover there was also a large amount of agreement as to how that poverty was to be relieved. Paine argued that in a democracy the cost of government would be slashed as there would be no unnecessary wars to finance nor court pensioners and sinecurists to provide for. He calculated that the savings consequent to the installation of a democratic government would be such as to allow for massive tax cuts. These tax reductions would immeasurably help the poor by lowering the cost of necessities. Moreover, as Thomas Muir obliquely pointed out, lower prices would expand markets and - it may be inferred - stimulate employment.²⁰⁰ This argument proved particularly attractive to the Scottish radicals. The continual references in contemporary radical literature to the oppressive tax burdens of the poor and industrious can only be properly understood in the context of this theory. The Scottish radicals looked forward, on the attainment of their political goal, to an economic golden age of expanding trade and industry, rising living standards, and full employment. The Partick "Sons of Liberty" expected that radical reform would produce "social comfort" and "plenty",²⁰¹ while the Paisley Friends of the People urged

200. Alexander Johnston, a bleacher in Kincaid Printfield who attended the inaugural meeting of the Kirkintilloch society on 3 November 1792, deponed that Muir had addressed the meeting and had "compared our constitution with the French, and said, that beyond a doubt they would be successful. That they were more equally represented, and their taxes much less. That two-thirds of the French national debt was already paid. That a manufacturer in this country could not bring his goods to market with the same advantage as the French manufacturers; of course, we should lose our trade." Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 137-138.

201. The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer, 19-23 November 1792. The Partick society's advertisement is also to be found in Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 35.

the people to "Pursue the only course which can ever effect any considerable reduction of debts and taxes, or materially advance the interests of manufactures and commerce" and held out happiness and prosperity as the inevitable consequences of democratic government.²⁰²

As Maurice Margarot put it:- "there is not a man who would exert his industry, but might earn a comfortable livelihood if our constitution was returned" to its original purity.²⁰³ Paine, however, went further than merely advocating tax cuts as a means to abolish poverty. In chapter five of the second part of his 'Rights of Man' he drew up a comprehensive and far-sighted scheme of welfare benefits. His prototype welfare state would have encompassed the provision of state subsidised schooling for the poor, old age pensions, marriage, maternity, and funeral benefits, and the construction of 'work-houses' to provide shelter and employment for the destitute who would have been free to come and go as they wished.²⁰⁴ This scheme has been described as "crucial" by E.P. Thompson,²⁰⁵ but, whatever may have been the case in England, it does not appear to have been crucially important in Scotland.

Certainly James Tytler's 'Historical Register' advocated, as early as August 1791, the establishment of a system of "public succours... for the relief of the infirm poor, and of the poor not infirm, who want work", and suggested that much of the Church of England's income should be diverted to provide "free schools" to educate the "notoriously ignorant" English lower classes.²⁰⁶ Moreover, Niel Douglas

202. Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 123.

203. IBID, 727.

204. T. Paine, op cit, 124-138.

205. E.P. Thompson, op cit, 101-102.

206. The Historical Register, or, Edinburgh Monthly Intelligencer. Vol. 1. No 2. (August, 1791) 48, 74.

contemplated how the sums spent on government pensions might be redirected to "refresh the bowels of the fatherless and orphan."²⁰⁷ These however are stray references: any inquiry into the Scottish radicals' attitude towards state involvement in the relief of poverty encounters what amounts to a wall of silence. Nowhere in any of the radicals' newspaper advertisements, printed addresses, or handbills is there to be found any reference or even allusion to Paine's 'social chapter.' This silence does not necessarily indicate that the radicals opposed Paine's scheme, but it does prove that it was not given a high priority. It is probable however that the Scottish radicals, like their Irish counterparts,²⁰⁸ were favourably inclined towards a state financed education system, while opposing Paine's other welfare proposals. One of the committees of the British Convention drew up a list of grievances which included "The want of a fund for the Education of the Poor",²⁰⁹ but there was no mention of old-age pensions or any other of the state benefits proposed by Paine. The marked individualism of the artisan community, from which the bulk of the radicals originated, offers, perhaps, the most likely explanation for this apparent lack of interest in welfare schemes. The artisans bore the standard of economic individualism and championed in their Friendly Societies the doctrine of collective self-help. It was not the state's but the individual's responsibility, they believed, to provide economic security.

This economic individualism was of an uncompromising nature and involved a direct attack upon not only the powerful vested interests which dominated the Scottish economy but also the hierarchical structure of Scottish society. What the radicals proposed was tantamount to a social and economic revolution.

207. N. Douglas, "Thoughts on Modern Politics," 126.

208. R.B. McDowell, *op cit*, 373.

209. List of Grievances drawn up by a committee of the British Convention in JC 26/280.

The radicals were the disciples of Adam Smith. They argued that no hindrances should be put in the way of economic activity and that all should be free to pursue their own chosen trade and sell their goods wherever they wished. "The freedom of trade", opined a contributor to the 'Edinburgh Gazetteer', "should be as open as the air; and why one body of men should have a preference for [sic] another - we feel ourselves at a loss to understand."²¹⁰ Neither the state nor any other organisation, they argued, should interfere in the operation of the economy. "Commerce needs no other protection", Paine wrote, "than the reciprocal interest which every nation feels in supporting it - it is common stock - it exists by a balance of advantages to all; and the only interruption it meets, is from the present uncivilized state of government, and which it is its common interest to reform."²¹¹ Whatever the intention of government, it was argued, any interference in the natural flow of trade was misguided. As George Mealmaker, a Dundee weaver and radical, put it:- "trade is like water, it will find its own level."²¹² The economic and political rights of the individual, it was argued, were connected. A delegate meeting of the Kilmarnock societies, held on 7 February 1793, resolved that "neither liberty nor privileges ought to be local; that all monopolies whatever,

210. The Edinburgh Gazetteer, 7 December 1792.

211. T. Paine, op cit, 88.

212. G. Mealmaker. "The Moral and Political Catechism of Man; or, A Dialogue between a Citizen of the World and an inhabitant of Britain." (Edinburgh, 1797), unpaginated. The copy consulted is in Home Office Correspondence (Scotland), RH2/4/83, ff27-40.

whether in trade or representation, are grievances which ought to be redressed." The meeting went on to vote thanks to the various bodies which had opposed the renewal of the East India Company's charter,²¹³ but it was local rather than international trading monopolies that directly concerned and angered the men who attended radical meetings. Tytler's 'Historical Register' complained that

"Every chartered town is an aristocratical monopoly in itself... In these chartered monopolies, a man coming from another part of the country is hunted from them as if he was a foreign enemy... every one of these places presents a barrier in this way, and tells him that he is not a freeman, that he has no rights. Within these monopolies there are other monopolies. A man, even of the same town, whose parents were not in circumstances to give him an occupation, is debarred, in many cases, from the natural right of acquiring one, be his genius or industry what it may."²¹⁴

Trade Incorporations and Merchant Guilds, it was argued, constituted an infringement of the natural right of all men to earn their living in whatever manner suited their "genius". The Forfar Friends of the People declared "that every citizen has a right to earn his livelihood by any honest means in his power, and consequently, that to cramp or

213. The Edinburgh Gazetteer, 26 February 1793. J.T. Callender remarked that "By an oriental monopoly, we have obtained the unexampled privilege of buying a pound of the same tea, for six or eight shillings, with which other nations would eagerly supply us for twenty pence." J.T. Callender, *op cit*, 11.

214. The Historical Register, or, Edinburgh Monthly Intelligencer. Vol. 1. No. 2. (August, 1791), 47.

prohibit, by any kind of monopoly the use and exertion of these, is an act of suicide on Society, and an insult to the common sense of mankind."²¹⁵ The restrictionism of the Guilds and Incorporations and the bad consequences that flowed from it were pointed out in a paper presented to the 3rd Convention in October 1793. The author stated that

"The dues of the Guildry [of Stirling, which he took as a typical burgh] are upwards of £23; and the candidate must have a capital of £200 Ster^l before he be admitted. The dues of the trades are little short; and those of the bakers are swelled to the enormous sum of £60. In a small town like Stirling such regulations must effectually crush the improvement of commerce, and prevent a village [sic] from ever becoming a Town or City. Sixty pounds would add considerably to the Stock required by a Baker... why strip the youth of his money, when he most needs it, for no other purpose than to buy priviledges to his children, before they know if he is to have any."²¹⁶

Laissez-faire has become associated with the sordid inequalities of Victorian Britain and with the heartless and pessimistic doctrines of Ricardo and Malthus, but it is well to remind ourselves that in late eighteenth century Britain it was a profoundly libertarian doctrine based upon optimistic assumptions about the benefits to all men of economic growth. Smith, Paine, and the Scottish radicals firmly

215. The Edinburgh Gazetteer, 7 December 1792. Both the Forfar declaration and the article in the 'Historical Register' paraphrase Paine on this subject, see T. Paine, op cit, 61-62.

216. "Review of the Constitution and Government of Great Britain". pp.80-81, in JC 26/276. It might be noted that the Rev. James Sommerville of Stirling commented that "The jealous and contracted spirit of corporation, ever tenacious of ancient customs, and hostile to all novelty and invention, nay, expulsive of the enterprising stranger, has kept the inhabitants of Stirling trudging on in the routine of their great-great-grandfathers". OSA, VIII, 275.

believed that the economic liberation of the individual would create a prosperity in which all would share. There was no suggestion that economic individualism would lead to degrading poverty for the bulk of the population.²¹⁷

The radicals' attack on economic restrictionism was unlikely to endear them to the members of the Guilds and Incorporations. The Glasgow Incorporation of Weavers met on 15 December 1792 to declare their loyalty to the king and constitution and to express their abhorrence of "seditious writings... calculated to bring about... mischievous consequences, which would particularly subvert the Trade, Manufacturers, and Chartered Rights of this Incorporation."²¹⁸ In Perth a meeting of the Merchant Guild was thrown into an uproar when a delegation from the Friends of the People presented a set of resolutions for their consideration, one of which "was to the effect 'That as Providence had given every man his calling, he had a right to exercise it to the best advantage, independent of exclusive privileges'."²¹⁹ While not all Trade Incorporations and Merchant Guilds were opposed to radical reform, the appeal of such a policy was considerably lessened by the inveterate hostility of the radicals towards these organisations.

217. The radicals believed that the abolition of trade monopolies would lower the cost of goods and thus raise the standard of living among the poor. The old exclusive system, they argued, enriched the monopolists and impoverished the rest of society. Niel Douglas wrote that the trade monopolies, "like every other partial system, may enrich and aggrandise a few, but is at the expence of Society in general." N. Douglas, "Thoughts on Modern Politics", 130.

218. The Glasgow Courier, 18 December 1792.

219. G. Penny, op cit, 67. It might be noted that there was some opposition from within the radical movement to this attack upon corporate rights. When Alexander Bremner moved that the 3rd Convention "draw up a few leading features of our grievances, such as corporation laws, test acts, patronage, &c", Alexander Aitchison and David Downie, who were both members of the Edinburgh Goldsmiths' Incorporation, "objected to the word [sic] corporation laws". Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 397, 405.

The radical campaign against "monopoly" involved more than an assault upon the exclusive privileges of the East India Company, Trade Incorporations, and Merchant Guilds, it comprehended also an attack upon the legally secured privileges of the landed classes. The Excise Laws, as we have seen,²²⁰ were condemned by the radicals as class legislation which penalised the poor and industrious in order to benefit the landed interest. The Corn Laws, the Game Laws, and the Entail Laws were viewed in much the same light. It was argued that the Corn Laws were a species of monopoly and as such indefensible. The 'Edinburgh Gazetteer' stated that the Corn Laws "as completely prevent the cheapness of all kinds of grain, as if they had been contrived by the most grasping monopolizer that ever existed,"²²¹ while the committee of the British Convention included the obnoxious laws in its list of grievances to be redressed.²²² The Game Laws were similarly categorised as a form of monopoly. Indeed Paine linked his discussions of the Game Laws and trade monopolies together.²²³ The "Constitutional Club" of Kilmarnock celebrated Bastille Day in 1792 by drinking as a toast "May no game laws confine to the luxuries of a few what nature has given to the necessities of all",²²⁴ while Niel Douglas wrote that game was "what the God of nature intended should be equally free and accessible to the poor as to

220. See Chapter 2, pp. 141-150.

221. The author of the article in question went on to argue that if the Corn Laws were abolished oat-meal would sell at nine pence per peck. 'The Edinburgh Gazetteer', 19 November 1793. By that time the normal price of oat-meal was over 1/- per peck.

222. List of Grievances. JC 26/280.

223. T. Paine. "Rights of Man, being an Answer to Mr. Burke's Attack on the French Revolution." (2nd edn, London, 1971), 61-62.

224. The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer, 16-20 July 1792.

the rich."²²⁵ The British Convention's committee noted "The Game & Fishing Laws" among its list of grievances,²²⁶ while the 'Edinburgh Gazetteer' stated that among the benefits to be obtained from a radical reform would be "the abolition of the game laws, which, like similar laws in the kingdom, were only calculated for the meridian of despotism". The same article proceeded to claim that the people could look forward, "above all, to a complete destruction of that most infamous of all laws, the law of entails."²²⁷ This law was regarded as a particularly objectionable example of class legislation. The law of entails, it was argued, was fundamentally unjust, put unnatural checks upon the transfer of property, restricted social mobility, and created, or at least reinforced, undesirable social divisions. The Rev. Robert Small of Dundee recorded that "the trading people... think that property of every kind ought to be liable for the debts it has given opportunity to collect; that the contrary practice is unjust, and the laws [of entail] which authorise it, nothing different from licences to a species of swindling."²²⁸ The author of the 'Review of the Constitution and Government of Great Britain' argued that the landed interest in utilising the entail laws formed themselves into a separate class from the rest of society, constituting "a part of mankind whose opulence cannot diminish but may increase." He went on to complain that the owners of entailed estates, "being thus separated from the community,... are inclined to look on the industrious part as a separate species, noway entitled to that

225. N. Douglas, "Thoughts on Modern Politics", 119.

226. List of Grievances. Loc cit.

227. The Edinburgh Gazetteer, 30 November 1972.

228. OSA, VIII, 244.

affluence and splendour which they possess". He contrasted the laws of entail which "biget pride, tyranny, sloth and ignorance" with "Industry" which "produces opulence, strength, activity and virtue." Were the entail laws abolished, he added, and "Property allowed to fluctuate in its natural course, it would no longer be engrossed by the unworthy, or be the birthright of the fool."²²⁹ The same line of argument was adopted by the Paineite author of an 'Essay Concerning Entails' who asserted that the nation would suffer no loss if families who had once distinguished themselves should fall back to their first origin in consequence of the extravagance of heirs. "This", he stated, "is just as it ought to be, and according to the venerable institutions of heaven, that imprudence and vice should meet with their due rewards."²³⁰ The detestation in which the entail laws were held assured them a place in the list of grievances drawn up by the committee of the British Convention.²³¹

The privileged position of the landed classes within the Church of Scotland was also a subject of radical complaint. The Patronage Act of 1712 had long been opposed as an infringement of popular liberties, and the radicals were not slow to add their weight to the opposition. The "odious and detestable Law of Patronage"²³² was frequently attacked by radicals as "an imposition on our civil and religious liberties",²³³ and its abolition held out as one of the

229. "Review of the Constitution and Government of Great Britain", pp 42, 44-45. JC26/276.

230. The Bee, or Literary Weekly Intelligencer. VIII, 335.

231. List of Grievances. Loc cit.

232. So called in a motion by John Mitchell, the Strathaven delegate, proposing that ecclesiastical patronage be included in the list of grievances to be drawn up by the 3rd Convention. JC26/280.

233. See the resolutions of the Cambuslang Society of the Friends of the Constitution and of the People, 5 March 1793. 'The Edinburgh Gazetteer', 8 March 1793.

benefits to be obtained from a radically reformed legislature.²³⁴ So far as is known the radicals never detailed the sort of system they wanted to replace patronage, but it is almost certain that they intended that every adult male member of the church should have an equal say in the election of his minister. It certainly seems clear that no return to the situation as it applied between 1690 and 1712 was envisaged: Thomas Muir denounced the Act of 1690 as "a mere juggle" which "had been a foundation of eternal quibbles."²³⁵

Associated with this assault upon the privileges of the landed classes was a radical programme of wide ranging legal reforms. The civil law, it was argued, was "so intricate and perplexed "²³⁶ as to be of use only to grasping lawyers²³⁷ and their rich clients. The complexity of the law rendered legal action so expensive that "a poor man cannot afford to hazard an application for a redress of grievances" thus putting it "in the power of a rich man to ruin his poor neighbour with impunity."²³⁸ What the radicals demanded was a simplification of

234. For example, in a pamphlet entitled "A Few Facts and Remarks" published by the Glasgow Association of the Friends of the Constitution and of the People. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH2/4/65, f116.

235. Meikle, op cit, 258.

236. The laws, Niel Douglas complained, were too "multifarious and diversified" to be fully known and understood by the people, while many of them "are so intricate and perplexed as to afford abundant scope for the chicanery of professional men". N. Douglas, "Thoughts on Modern Politics", 118.

237. There can have been few groups in society so disliked as the lawyers. Professor John Wilde wrote that "as to the law, they[ie the "rabble"] think... that the absense of lawyers is the absense of chicane", while the author of an article published in the 'Bee' and entitled "On Arbitration" stated that "traders are often very unjustly prejudiced against the learned gentlemen of the gown" and that because of the expense of going to law, they frequently referred disputes to arbitrators. J. Wilde, op cit, 132; and, 'The Bee or Literary Weekly Intelligencer', VI, 301-302. See also a radical commentary on the loyalist pamphlet "France a Warning to Britain" in which it is asserted that "Our Advocates, Attorneys, and Lawyers may take warning by those of France, as the Sans Culottes reckon them worse than the Plagues of Egypt." JC26/280.

238. The Edinburgh Gazetteer, 7 December 1792.

the civil laws,²³⁹ which would, they argued, effectively open up the courts to the poor as well as the rich by reducing the cost of civil actions. Moreover, while it does not appear to have had as high a priority as the simplification of the civil code, at least some radicals proposed reforming the bloody criminal law. Thomas Muir as a practicing lawyer was well aware of the vicious nature of the criminal law, and is reported to have said "that the court of justiciary would need a thorough reform" and to have complained "that they got their money for nothing but pronouncing death upon poor creatures."²⁴⁰ Niel Douglas protested that God's law was infringed when infanticide and duelling "pass with impunity, or a mulct; and theft is punished with death",²⁴¹ while the committee of the British Convention considered the "excessive bails & fines" imposed by the courts to be a grievance.²⁴² The humanity and regard for justice that inspired this desire to reform the criminal law also prompted the radicals' opposition to the slave trade, impress warrants,²⁴³ and the barbaric methods employed to enforce military and naval discipline.²⁴⁴

239. Niel Douglas praised the French Revolutionaries for "simplifying and abridging processes at law". N. Douglas, "Thoughts on Modern Politics", 119. 'K' wrote to the Printer of the Gazetteer stating that one of the benefits of reform should be "A simplification of the Laws". 'The Edinburgh Gazetteer', 7 December 1792. A "freen to Impartial Jureys" wrote to an unknown newspaper stating that "one of my reasons for a Reform in parliament is, that from a Good & impartial parliament we might expect some Reform in our laws which few or none can understand." Copy in JC26/280. The radical commentary on the conservative pamphlet "France a Warning to Britain" stated that "Our Parliamenters may take warning by those of France, and make their Laws plainer and shorter, that the Rabble may have it in their power to purchase them... and be able to understand them". Loc cit.

240. Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 148.

241. N. Douglas, "Thoughts on Modern Politics", 117-118.

242. List of Grievances. Loc cit.

243. For example, an anti-war meeting held in Edinburgh on 4 January 1793 condemned Impress Warrants as "a species of slave trade". 'The Edinburgh Gazetteer', 11 January 1793.

244. The radical commentary on the pamphlet "France a Warning to Britain" stated that "The Commanders of our Fleets and Armies, may take warning by those of France 'do violence to no man'." Loc cit.

The radical objective was to break the stranglehold which the landed classes exercised on Scottish life thereby creating a more just, humane, and prosperous society in which all would be equal and equally free. 'Liberty and Equality' was the motto of Scottish radicalism as well as of the French Revolution. A radical pamphlet, entitled 'Rights of Man delineated, and the Origin of Government' which was published in September 1792 and distributed widely in Scotland,²⁴⁵ quoted in full the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man, and of Citizens, by the National Assembly of France', the sixth article of which asserted that all men should be "equally eligible to all honours, places, and employments, according to their different abilities without any other distinction than that created by their virtues and talents."²⁴⁶ This theme figures repeatedly in the radical literature of the period. For example, a correspondent identifying himself only as 'K' wrote to the 'Edinburgh Gazetteer' in December 1792 stating that among the benefits of a radical reform would be that "Virtue and ability (in place of interest and wealth) [were] to be alone respected."²⁴⁷ The aristocratic world of privilege, 'influence', and patronage was to be destroyed, and with it the old hierarchical structure of society. All men whether they owned thousands of acres or worked as journeymen for small master tradesmen were to have equal rights. A man's position in society and his chances of advancement were no longer to be determined or influenced by the accident of birth. Power was no longer to be monopolised by the landed classes and employed in their own interests and against those of the bulk of the population. Come the radical

245. J. Stirling to H. Dundas, 22 September 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH2/4/64, ff 329-332.

246. Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 27.

247. The Edinburgh Gazetteer, 7 December 1792.

millennium Government was to be no longer what James Callender described as "a conspiracy of the rich against the poor."²⁴⁸

The radicals found some difficulty in analysing the nature of the struggle in which they were engaged. Sometimes the conflict was portrayed as one between the rich and the poor,²⁴⁹ while at other times it was seen as one between the "people" and the beneficiaries of corruption.²⁵⁰ However through this mist of analytical imprecision and confusion there gradually emerged a sociology which was to form the basis of the post-war radicals' understanding of their society and the nature of their political struggle. Society, it was argued, was divided between those who produced wealth and those who consumed it. 'The Address of the British Convention' declared that it was the radicals' boast "that this association consists of the honest hands that bring forth the fruits of industry, and not of the useless mouths which consume them."²⁵¹ The interests of these two classes were, it was argued, quite different from and indeed opposed to each other. A radical pamphlet entitled 'Dialogue between the Governors and the Governed', which was based upon Volney's 'Les Ruines' and circulated in Scotland in 1792-1793,²⁵² explained that nations were divided into two classes. On the one hand there were the "Idle classes" composed of

248. J.I. Callender, *op cit*, 23.

249. *IBID*. See also Margarot's opening speech at his trial in which he attacked the injustice of a law which permitted gentlemen to agitate for reform but forbade the poor to do the same. Margarot explained the operation of the law thus - "Because we are poor, it is sedition in us; but when your county meetings are held, it is no longer sedition, but it is a thing that is authorized". He went on to state that "it has been a decided plan of those in power, to plunder the poor to give to the rich". Howell, *State Trials*, XXIII, 619, 725.

250. For example, 'Verus' wrote that by December 1792 "few are now against reform of one kind or other, except those who have an interest in opposing it." 'The Caledonian Chronicle', 7 December 1792.

251. "The Address of the British Convention, assembled at Edinburgh, November 19, 1793, to the People of Great Britain." (London, 1794), 21.

252. Thomas Muir was accused of distributing the pamphlet in the west of Scotland in late 1792. Howell, *State Trials*, XXIII, 119.

"priests of the higher orders, financiers, nobles, great officers of armies", and on the other there was "a great body... composed of labourers, of artizans, of shopkeepers, of all professions useful to society." When the people asked the idle classes how they had acquired their riches they replied, "By taking the trouble to govern you". This answer provoked an angry response from the producing classes -

"Really! Let us see what it is you call government! We toil and sweat, and you enjoy; we produce and you dissipate; riches come from us, and you swallow them up - Distinguished class, who are not the people, form a separate nation, if you please, and take the trouble to govern yourselves."

At this point the editor of the pamphlet intruded a footnote. He wrote that

"this Dialogue between the People and the Idle Classes, is the analysis of all society. All the vices, all the political disorders, are deducible from this source. Men who do nothing and who devour the substance of others: men who arrogate to themselves particular rights, exclusive privileges of riches and idleness: such men are the source and definition of all the abuses which exist among the nations."²⁵³

Almost certainly the "Idle Classes" of whom the editor was thinking were the landed classes. The parasitism of the landed interest was denounced by Paine in a memorable passage. "The aristocracy", he wrote, "are not the farmers who work the land and raise the produce, but are the mere consumers of the rent; and when compared with the

253. "Dialogue Between the Governors and the Governed". "By Monsieur de Volney". in JC26/276.

active world are the drones... who neither collect the honey nor form the hive, but exist only for lazy enjoyment."²⁵⁴ This idle and parasitic aristocracy was increasingly perceived as having an interest somewhat different from that of the bulk of the population. "Aristocracies", the 'Edinburgh Gazetteer' observed, "in general have no regard for the happiness of the people, who, in their turn, have neither veneration or esteem for a society of men who enjoy all the blessings of life, without ever having the trouble or ability of procuring them."²⁵⁵ Nevertheless despite this progress the radicalism of the 1790s was still groping its way towards a theory of class conflict. For many radicals their enemies were still the court pensioners, sinecurists, and burgh-mongers of 'Old Corruption' rather than any identifiable social class.

The intellectual debt of the Scottish radical reform movement to Paine was immense, but if the 'Rights of Man' became the bible of the movement it was a bible which was rarely explicitly referred to by the societies either in their newspaper advertisements or in their addresses and declarations. In part this caution was owing to tactical considerations. Open and unqualified praise for the great republican's work might only serve to give the authorities a reason for instituting criminal proceedings against the radicals. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, the radicals sought to avoid identifying themselves as Paineites because they were unwilling to make enemies of men they perceived to be potential friends. The 'Rights of Man' was regarded by many 'friends to reform' (including, it might be added, at least some members of the radical societies themselves) as a dangerously

254. T. Paine. "Rights of Man. Part the Second combining Principle and Practice". (5th edn, London, 1792), 104.

255. The Edinburgh Gazetteer, 2 July 1793.

extreme work. Its outspoken hostility towards monarchy and aristocracy and its contempt for parliamentary methods of obtaining reform alarmed many 'moderate' reformers, while its attack on church establishments was totally unacceptable to most orthodox Calvinists. To express unqualified approval of such a book would only needlessly limit the appeal of the radical movement and invite prosecution and persecution.

Thomas Muir's attitude towards the 'Rights of Man' illustrates that of the movement in general. He had a high regard both for Paine and for his political writings, but his admiration was not untempered by criticism. When Muir met Paine in Paris he quarrelled violently with him over religion.²⁵⁶ Paine's deist and disestablishmentarian views were unacceptable to many of the Scots radicals. That the Test Act should be abolished and that a full liberty of conscience should be established was agreed, but few Scottish radicals identified with or expressed support for Paine's theology or for his voluntaryism. Paine's view of monarchy and aristocracy was equally unacceptable, if for a significantly different reason. Muir, the most hostile witness at his trial deponed, "was for a monarchy under proper restrictions [believing] that a republican form of government was the best but that monarchy had been so long established in this country... it would be improper to alter it,"²⁵⁷ The Scottish radicals, however strong their theoretical

256. K. Logue. "Thomas Muir" in "History is my Witness" ed. G. Menzies. (BBC, 1976), 36.

257. Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 151. See also Skirving's evidence at the same trial. Skirving deponed "that he never heard Mr. Muir speak against the monarchical part of our constitution... that he remembers a private conversation with Mr. Muir, in which he disapproved of many of the principles in Paine's book, and both agreed that many of them were impracticable". IBID, 169.

attachment to republicanism, were keenly aware that there was little support for such a policy in the country and consequently did not pursue it. Moreover, whatever their innermost convictions, few radicals were prepared to come forward and publicly assert that it was their intention to abolish the titled aristocracy. Niel Douglas while fully agreeing with the principle of abolishing all honorary titles (because "only merit constitutes nobility") questioned the expediency of the policy.²⁵⁸

As Douglas' fellow dissenter Archibald Bruce put it

"The general inclination and prejudice of the nation, as well as experience and habit, are on the side of the old mode of government. The monarch, and his descendants, might long wear unimpaired the honours of his crown, with all the vain and expensive apparatus annexed to it: the Peers might continue to sit unmolested, in their higher house... The proud Baron, or the titled fool, might long be permitted to display to the gaze of children their ensigns armorial: the knighted companions might continue to keep festivals, and pour out libations, in honour of their invisible patrons, and strut in their ribbands, stars, and garters... Being long accustomed to the use, and certain advantages of some of these institutions, the British people have learned to consider them as highly important, if not indispensably necessary, and have almost forgotten the danger and disadvantages resulting from them... they never think of philosophising or reflecting upon them."²⁵⁹

258. N. Douglas, "A Monitory Address", 15. The Stirling Society of the Friends of Liberty and the People were almost unique in coming forward publicly to declare their opposition to hereditary titles. They met on 9 November 1792 and resolved that "Whilst we cheerfully profess our highest respect for those laurels, whether civil or military, that have been won by merit, we reckon it consistent to testify our detestation of all distinctions, that are neither founded in virtue, nor dependent on reason." 'The Edinburgh Gazetteer', 16 November 1792.

259. A. Bruce, "Reflections on the Freedom of Writing", 79-80.

The leadership of the movement, and the movement in general, were sufficiently sagacious to realise that the country was not prepared to countenance democratic republican policies and that there was no political mileage to be gained from adopting such a public posture. To have done so would have driven the movement into a political cul-de-sac. The way forward, it was realised, was to stick close to the constitutional road, to concentrate upon reforming the House of Commons, and to refuse to be diverted into attacking either the monarchy or the House of Lords.

Almost without exception the resolutions of the radical societies declared their objectives to be an equal representation of the people in the House of Commons and a shorter duration of parliamentary delegation. The almost universal use of this vague political formula was no accident: it proclaimed to the world the constitutionalism of the reformers and kept the door open for the sort of reformers who would have been scared off by a declaration in favour of universal suffrage. Although the door was left open few 'moderate' reformers, as we have seen, walked in. Thus, despite its largely 'moderate' leadership, the movement's rank and file was composed, almost exclusively it seems, of men attracted to a radical, indeed democratic, reform. Throughout 1792 and into 1793 these men were quite happy to retain the use of the phrase "equal representation", but even before the movement decided to define precisely what they meant by that expression, it was becoming increasingly clear that they meant universal manhood suffrage. The author of the essay entitled 'Equality' explained that what the radicals meant by equality was that "every person [sic]... may equally have a voice in the election of those who make the laws by which he is affected in his liberty, his life, or his property."²⁶⁰ Two days before this

260. The Edinburgh Gazetteer, 14 December 1792.

explanation was published in the 'Edinburgh Gazetteer' Thomas Muir had stated to the 1st Convention that "The great object we ought to have in view is equal representation; that every man, who is twenty-one years of age, who is not insane, under influence, or a criminal, should have a voice in the election of his representatives."²⁶¹ One month later, on 14 January 1793, the Kilbarchan Societies of the Friends of the People met and, having declared that their object was "an equal representation and a shorter duration of Parliaments", resolved that "every man who pays taxes for the support of Government (insane persons and criminals only excepted) has a right to vote in the choice of his representative."²⁶² Conservative observers and commentators were in no doubt that the Scottish Friends of the People were proposing the revolutionary measure of universal suffrage under the constitutionalist cover of "equal representation". A 'Querist' wrote an open letter to the Paisley United Societies asking what they meant by equal representation and rhetorically enquiring, "if it is, as some of your brethren say in conversation, that every male of 21 years of age shall have a vote", whether such a scheme "which has no foundation in what you call the principles of the Constitution, would not be subversive of it, and would not, notwithstanding your professed attachment to our present form of government, effect a complete revolution?"²⁶³ The same theme was taken up in late November

261. Meikle, op cit, 258.

262. The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer, 18-21 January 1793. In the same month a "Society for Parliamentary Reform" met in the Britannia Tavern, Paisley, and, having declared that their object was to obtain "a full, fair, and equal representation of the people in Parliament", resolved "That as Labourers and Mechanics are the only real supporters of Government, they ought to have a share in the Legislation". 'The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer', 21-25 January 1793.

263. The Glasgow Courier, 3 January 1793.

or early December 1792 by 'A Burgher of Edinburgh' who wrote a short loyalist pamphlet entitled 'A Letter to Mr. Hugh Bell, Chairman of the Convention of Delegates'. The author mischievously claimed that the letter had been written in order "to learn what the Friends of the People mean by an equal representation" and, after referring to and quoting from Paineite "essays and dissertations in the newspapers", slyly enquired "Are the opinions and tenets of Mr. Paine and the reforming societies the same [and] what is the ultimatum of the reformers?"²⁶⁴ Candid answers to these two questions would have involved the radicals in some embarrassing and potentially harmful admissions and consequently were not forthcoming. However the third of the loyalist pamphleteer's questions was more easily answered. The author, having drawn attention to Paine's ridicule of constitutional methods, enquired how the societies meant to obtain equal representation. The bald answer was that they intended to petition the House of Commons.

The decision to petition the House of Commons was only arrived at after a major argument, the outcome of which left at least some of the defeated side determined to keep the question open. At a meeting of the Edinburgh delegate convention on 21 November 1792, a spy reported, "the idea was not to petition Parliament, but [to] assert it [ie their demands] as a matter of right."²⁶⁵ One week later when the delegates reconvened the whole question of petitioning was once more raised. At this meeting James Sanson, a Canongate grocer and member of the Canongate society, argued that petitioning the House of Commons "appeared to him like the trunk of a tree begging nourishment from its branches, & therefore insisted that the proper mode should be to petition the King to dissolve the Parliament & call a New One to be elected by the people

264. "A Burgher of Edinburgh". "A Letter to Mr. Hugh Bell, Chairman of the Convention of Delegates". (Edinburgh, 1792), 3-7.

265. Anonymous Intelligence Report dated 22 November 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH2/4/65, ff60-61.

at large." Sanson's proposal "met with the approbation of a part of the house"; but was vigorously opposed by the leadership and defeated.²⁶⁶ This defeat roused James Tytler to dash off an inflammatory handbill denouncing the leadership as men "in whom I wish you to put no confidence" and asking "Will you suffer yourselves to be duped, and to be made the tools of every one who thinks proper to assume the authority over you." To petition the House of Commons, he argued, was pointless. The House of Commons had "already showed itself unworthy of confidence" and had become the master rather than the servant of the people. No redress could be expected from "a vile junto of aristocrats" and the people should petition the king to dissolve Parliament and order democratic elections. Tytler concluded his handbill by arguing that in the event of the king ignoring the petition the people should refuse to pay taxes and should frame their own laws.²⁶⁷ Tytler's handbill was circulated among the population of Edinburgh by friendly radicals,²⁶⁸ but his arguments failed to convince the movement. Nevertheless dissent did not disappear. When the 1st Convention met, on 11 December 1792, "a country delegate... proposed that instead of petitioning Parliament the Convention should address the king."²⁶⁹ Thereafter the proposal was periodically resurrected, most notably in October 1793, without ever finding majority support.

266. Anonymous Intelligence Report. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH2/4/65, ff127-137.

267. Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 2-5. Tytler wrote that "The conclusion is, if the king hear you not, keep your money in your pockets, and frame your own laws, and the minority must submit to the majority." IBID, 5.

268. See the Precognitions against James Tytler, 1792. EUL. Laing MSS. add 7. No 39. Among the radicals to distribute Tytler's handbill was James Sanson, the Canongate grocer.

269. Meikle, op cit, 243.

The argument over who to petition did not reflect any serious ideological division within the movement. It reflected rather the radicals' difficulty in finding a convincing solution to their most important problem, namely, how were they to achieve their objectives? Few, if any, radicals were under any illusions that the House of Commons would act according to the justice of their demands. The treatment meted out in recent years to the Test Act campaigners, the slave trade abolitionists, and the burgh reformers convinced all those with eyes to see that the House of Commons cared little for justice. Indeed, as we have seen, the intransigence of the House of Commons with regard to such reforms helped to stimulate the parliamentary reform movement. A radical pamphlet entitled 'Origin of Government', having referred to the "superciliousness and contempt" with which the burgh reformers had been treated by the House of Commons, argued that

"From the free-will and accord of such men, the people of Britain have very little chance of getting their representation extended on a more rational and equal plan. Such a reform must be accomplished by themselves."²⁷⁰

Precisely how the people were to go about obtaining the desired reform was not explained, but this omission may indicate nothing more sinister than an inability to spell out the details of a plan of operation. Nevertheless, while the radical movement does not appear to have formulated a precise plan of campaign, the guiding principles which directed their policies can be identified.

Massive public support was the sine qua non of the radical movement, and consequently the movement did everything in its power to obtain that support. To that end a great propaganda campaign was

270. Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 30.

launched in the autumn of 1792. Cheap editions of Paine's 'Rights of Man' were printed and distributed across the country.²⁷¹ Radical handbills and pamphlets were disseminated by both sympathetic booksellers and the radical societies themselves. Radical magazines such as the Sheffield 'Patriot' were imported. As early as 24 September 1792 Lord Provost Stirling of Edinburgh was dispatching examples of this literature to Home Secretary Dundas and sending "Expresses" to Lord Advocate Robert Dundas and the Solicitor General requesting an urgent meeting "to take under consideration, the seditious publications which continue to peep out here."²⁷² Among the material transmitted to Henry Dundas was the prospectus for a new radical newspaper to be called 'The Edinburgh Gazetteer', the first edition of which eventually appeared on 16 November 1792. The principal proprietor of the 'Edinburgh Gazetteer' was Captain William Johnston, a half-pay army officer of some property and social status,²⁷³ the chairman of the Fortune's Tavern meeting which inaugurated the Scottish Friends of the People, and a leading figure in both Edinburgh and national radical politics. Johnston's newspaper was the newspaper of the radical movement and as such played a prominent part in the propaganda campaign. The prospectus, having expressed loyalty to the constitution and denied any intention

271. For example John Elder, a bookseller and stationer in North Bridge Street, Edinburgh, who was described by Robert Watt the spy as the bookseller of the Edinburgh Friends of the People, "imported from London many copies of Paine's Rights of Man consisting of two parts each of which he sold for sixpence... [and] sold in his shop and sent to the country many copies of the cheap edition of said work printed in Edinburgh." "Declaration of John Elder", 19 December 1792. JC26/269.

272. J. Stirling to H. Dundas, 24 September 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH2/4/64, f333.

273. Johnston appears to have invested over £700 in the 'Gazetteer'. "Report of the Committee appointed to take into Consideration the proper measures for supporting the Gazetteer." JC26/280. Johnston had married well. Lord Provost Stirling reported that he had married "some years ago a Miss Hume daughter [to] Governor Home brother to Dr. Home of this city". J. Stirling to H. Dundas, 24 September 1792. Loc cit.

of inflaming the minds of the people or facilitating "the designs of the factious", declared that "we expect to demonstrate, that great abuses do exist in this country - that no interest in this Kingdom is fairly represented in Parliament - that the public money is squandered in the most infamous manner, in corrupting the People, and undermining the Constitution."²⁷⁴ The 'Gazetteer' performed a dual role, facilitating communication between radicals throughout the country and acting as a medium for the dissemination of radical ideas. Other newspapers, at least in 1792, were willing to publish the resolutions of radical societies, but the 'Gazetteer' and the 'Caledonian Chronicle'²⁷⁵ were unique in providing a platform for radical writers and in giving the news an explicitly radical tone.

The radicalism of the 1790s, as E.P. Thompson among others has pointed out, had unbounded faith in the power of reason and in what Paine called "a mass of sense lying in a dormant state" among the common people.²⁷⁶ Consequently the radicals in both Britain and Ireland, (and, it might be added, their successors in both the immediate post-war and Chartist periods²⁷⁷), laid great store by political education. Political education, it was argued, fulfilled two purposes: it destroyed the ignorance on which the Old Regime depended for its existence, and

274. The Edinburgh Gazetteer, 16 November 1792.

275. The 'Caledonian Chronicle' was published between 1792 and 1793. There is no known run of the newspaper extant and I have only been able to discover one edition, viz, that of 7 December 1792 which is located in the Mitchell Library, Glasgow. That edition and various stray references prove that the 'Caledonian Chronicle' was radical in its political orientation.

276. E.P. Thompson, op cit, 104.

277. W.M. Roach, op cit, 179-180; and A. Wilson, "The Chartist Movement in Scotland" (Manchester, 1970), 92.

it prepared the people for the responsible use of political power.

Thomas Muir declared, "Let personal reformation precede public; let the torch of knowledge lighten the path of liberty... A people ignorant - never can enjoy freedom; a people immoral - are unworthy of the blessing."²⁷⁸ Muir's sentiments were echoed by James Calder, the son of a Cromarty merchant, a student at the University of Edinburgh, and a member of the Canongate society, who wrote to William Skirving on 4 September 1793 approving of Skirving's "plan of diffusing knowledge, by publishing, now and then, some small essays on political subjects", asserting that "the People cannot reap great benefit from the recovery of their rights, without [sic] they know how to make a proper use of them", and arguing that "our endeavours ought, therefore, to be bent, wholly, towards opening the eyes of the people to their own interest."²⁷⁹

Such a policy had widespread support within the movement and when the 3rd Convention met in October 1793 it appointed a "committee of public instruction" to select and publish material which it was believed would promote the cause.²⁸⁰ The appointment of this committee merely institutionalised and centralised a policy which had long been pursued by the radicals. Part of the *raison d'être* of radical societies was political education. The Montrose society declared, at its meeting on 23 October 1792, that among the advantages resulting from the formation of radical societies was that "Information from all enlightened and liberal minded men, whatever part of the world they are in, will more easily be collected in such Societies, than when we exist as so many detached individuals; and the same holds true in diffusing knowledge."²⁸¹

278. Howell, *State Trials*, XXIII, 202.

279. James Calder to William Skirving, 4 September 1793. JC26/280.

280. Howell, *State Trials*, XXIII, 400.

281. *The Caledonian Mercury*, 3 November 1792.

The political education of the people was considered to be but the essential first step in securing the desired reform. The next step was to bring public opinion to bear upon Parliament. To this end political organisation and unity of purpose were indispensable. Joseph Gerrald, having pointed out the crucial importance of political education, argued that

"When you have got a sufficient number in every district, establish a correspondence among them - show them the necessity of uniting in the common plan of co-operation, then the people assembled in the different departments of the country, will resemble the ancient Folkmotes, and will speak in language too reasonable to be confuted, and too peremptory to be refused."²⁸²

The mobilisation of public opinion in order to exert pressure on Parliament was widely expected to bring success.²⁸³ Public opinion, Matthew Campbell Brown stated, "if once put in motion, by a strict union, and peaceable and constitutional petitions, must overbear every opposition."²⁸⁴ Little thought was directed at how political action could be supplemented and reinforced by economic measures against 'Old Corruption'. The idea of a general strike either never occurred to the radicals or was dismissed as impracticable. Tax strikes to deny

282. Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 450.

283. Colonel Macleod argued that "Reform may be combated; and will be combated, by men of great talents in high situations; but no talents, and no situations, can long resist the natural progress of human reason, directed and urged forward by the strongest feelings of the human heart." He advised the Scots radicals, "By violence you can do nothing; by constitutional patience and endeavours you will accomplish all your objects." N. Macleod. "Letters from Colonel Macleod, Member of Parliament for Inverness-shire, to the Chairman of the Association for Parliamentary Reform in Scotland." (London, 1793), 3 and 5.

284. Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 468.

administration the revenue necessary to carry on government were advocated as a measure of last resort by Tytler but seem never to have attracted much support from the movement as a whole. Reform was to be achieved by exclusively political methods.

At least some radicals were contemplating as early as 1792 what should happen if Parliament refused to bow to the pressure of constitutionally expressed public opinion. The 'Committee entrusted with preparations for a General Convention' stated in their report, which is probably dateable to November 1792, that the exclusion of the vast majority of the population from the political process "is an evident breach of the fundamental law of the Constitution which if his [ie the king's] House of C[ommons] refuse to remedy will render a call of the states unavoidable."²⁸⁵ Such doubts about Parliament's response to their demands were probably, at this stage, somewhat heretical. There is little evidence that the movement seriously considered the possibility that Parliament and the King would refuse to listen to the united voice of the nation expressed through reform petitions. No contingency plans, it seems, were drawn up to call a sovereign convention of the people. Moreover the doubts of the radicals' committee were for private consideration and not for public consumption. Tytler's handbill which publicly advocated revolutionary action as a last resort rocked the radical boat. Whatever the private thoughts of some individual radicals, the movement as a whole publicly disclaimed revolutionary intentions and expressed confidence in the constitutional road to reform.²⁸⁶

285. "Report of the Committee entrusted with preparations for a General Convention". JC26/280.

286. The newspaper press was bombarded during the winter of 1792-3 with radical societies' resolutions declaring their loyalty to the constitution, denouncing riot and sedition, and announcing their intention of petitioning the House of Commons for reform.

The generality of Scots radicals disagreed violently with Paine's contention that Britain did not have a constitution.²⁸⁷ They argued that Britain had a constitution, that it was fundamentally sound, and, consequently, that no realistic comparison could be drawn between the contemporary situation of Britain and that of pre-revolutionary France. "Our abuses", the 'Edinburgh Gazetteer' stated, "though many, are insignificant, compared to the Giant vices that for ages disgrac'd France,"²⁸⁸ while Thomas Muir argued "that there was no comparison betwixt this country and France: that in France they had sought a revolution and had brought it about, but that in Britain we wanted no revolution, but only a moderate reform."²⁸⁹ The great difference, it was argued, between pre-revolutionary France and Britain was that while France had been a despotism in which the people had no rights, Britain was a constitutional monarchy in which certain fundamental rights were protected. The 'Edinburgh Gazetteer' took issue with those who prophesied that reform would "necessarily be preceded by confusion and civil horrors." Such an argument, it stated, did

"not consider the different state of the two countries;-

In France, the government was diseased in its aspects, diseased in its extremities, and diseased in its vitals; and as to a constitution the very remains of it have so long been mouldering in the grave, that even the records of what it was, are almost effaced from history... But

287. Of the British constitution Paine wrote - "One member says, This is [the] Constitution; and another says, that is [the] Constitution - Today it is one thing; and tomorrow, it is something else - while the maintaining the debate proves there is none." T. Paine. "Rights of Man, being an Answer to Mr. Burke's Attack on the French Revolution." (2nd edn, London, 1791), 147.

288. The Edinburgh Gazetteer, 7 December 1792.

289. Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 178.

in England [sic]... the constitution is radically sound - we have only to renovate its purity and origin by reforming the unequal representation, and shortening the duration of Parliament."²⁹⁰

The Scottish radical movement was never happy resting its claims on natural rights and preferred instead to buttress its arguments with references to the ancient constitution. Radicals frequently claimed that they sought nothing more than the restoration of the constitution to its original purity. Such a line of argument had clear tactical advantages, for it proclaimed the constitutionalism of the movement and neatly distanced it from both Paine and so-called 'French... principles'. When the 1st Convention debated whether they wished to "restore" or "establish" the "freedom of election" Alexander Aitchison "insisted that no word in the English language was so proper as 'restore'; that if any other word such as 'obtain' or 'establish' was adopted, we might justly be accused of innovation," while Thomas Muir "insisted that if any word were adopted instead of 'restore', we were wrong in complimenting our Constitution." Muir added "Why praise, why flatter the British Constitution... if it is radically wrong, if it never was right?" The convention took this advice and resolved in favour of restoring the freedom of election.²⁹¹ One year later the 'Address of the British Convention', having described the 'democratic' glories of the Anglo-Saxon constitution and how these ancient freedoms had been destroyed by the 'Norman Yoke', asked

"Who are those, that are guilty of innovation? Is it that band of hirelings, to whom corruption is food, or is it we, who wish only to restore the principles of our Saxon ancestors?"²⁹²

290. The Edinburgh Gazetteer, 7 December 1792.

291. Meikle, op cit, 251, 248.

292. "The Address of the British Convention, assembled at Edinburgh, November 19, 1793, to the People of Great Britain." (London, 1794), 13.

The adoption of constitutionalist arguments did not limit the scope of radical policy. Constitutionalism clearly implied the acceptance of both monarchy and aristocracy, but, as we have seen, the movement regarded their abolition as impracticable. Whether the radicals based their claims upon natural or historical rights mattered little in the end, for the claims remained the same - a democratically elected House of Commons and more frequent elections. Indeed the Scottish radicals were wont to claim that their policies had the twofold sanction of both reason and history.²⁹³

Although the radicals were anxious to differentiate between the constitutional positions of Britain and pre-revolutionary France and thus between themselves and the revolutionaries, they were determined in their support of the Revolution and passionate in their opposition to its enemies. Besides a natural sympathy with the French in their struggle for liberty, the radicals well realised the international dimension of the conflict that was focused on France. Revolutionary France was in the political front-line and should despotism triumph there it was feared that it would reassert itself throughout Europe. Indeed at least some radicals feared that should the "wicked combination" succeed in destroying French liberty, then British freedoms would also come under attack from the forces of despotism. The radicals, and some Foxites, were deeply worried by recent British political developments, most notably the Proclamation of May 1792, which they regarded as pointing the way to despotism. The author of a radical pamphlet, published in Glasgow on 26 November 1792, stated that he was "afraid that on a close examination, we shall find

293. The British Convention hedged its bets declaring that "Our rights have the two-fold sanction of reason and antiquity." *IBID*, 15.

that we are already more than half bound [in chains], and if we foolishly continue in our present state of torpid apathy, all efforts to extricate ourselves will be in vain."²⁹⁴ It was argued, in short, that the British radicals and the French revolutionaries were locked in a remarkably similar struggle against the forces of despotic reaction.

The summer and early autumn of 1792 saw British radicals watching anxiously as the crisis developed on the continent. As a combined Austrian and Prussian army assembled near the French border, its commander in chief, the Duke of Brunswick, issued a Manifesto which was in effect an ultimatum to the French. The Manifesto of 25 July intimated that the purpose of the allied invasion was to restore Louis XVI to his rightful authority, warned that resistance would be treated as rebellion, and threatened that Paris would be totally destroyed if the slightest violence was committed against the royal family. As rumours circulated of counter-revolutionary conspiracy and of the king's impending traitorous flight from his capital the sectionnaires and fédérés answered Brunswick by storming the Tuileries on 10 August. If democracy entered the stage of European history dripping in blood,²⁹⁵ it celebrated its first appearance with a veritable orgy of blood-letting. The immediate occasion for this orgy was the terrifying news of the surrender of Longwy and Verdun which opened the road to Paris for Brunswick's army. As volunteers massed to leave Paris to do battle with the invaders, rumours circulated that their departure would act as a signal for a royalist uprising led by imprisoned counter-

294. G. Hamilton to [H. Dundas?], 27 November 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH2/4/65, ff121-122. The pamphlet in question was entitled "A Word in Season to the Bakers, Brewers, Butchers, Spirit Dealers, etc in Glasgow, respecting the dangerous and deep laid scheme of Garrisoning this City by Barracks."

295. This important point is made forcibly by G.A. Williams. "Artisans and sans-culottes. Popular Movements in France and Britain during the French Revolution." (London, 1968), 38.

revolutionaries. Thus did the September Massacres, (in which counter-revolutionaries and common criminals were indiscriminately butchered by revolutionary tribunals), originate. The revolutionary "excesses" of the French, while they confirmed the worst fears of British conservatives and converted some Whig friends of French liberty,²⁹⁶ were readily and sympathetically understood by the Scots radicals. They were committed, 'A Hater of Tyranny' explained, by a people enraged by "The horrid perfidy, and the treacherous cruelty of their worthless King, and his as worthless confidants." "Had the despots of Austria and Prussia", he argued, "not interfered with French affairs, or had the King acted with becoming fidelity, we had [sic] heard of no such enormities."²⁹⁷ These opinions were echoed by Niel Douglas, who argued that the excesses of the revolutionaries had been "greatly exaggerated" by the friends of despotism²⁹⁸ and remarked that the betrayals suffered by the French since the commencement of the revolution were such that "we may even be surprised at the moderation

296. The Rev. Dr. Thomas Somerville of Jedburgh wrote that "The atrocities committed in Paris in August and September 1792 opened my eyes, and converted my joy into bitterness and sorrow; and the persons whom I had admired and praised as the models of patriotic virtue and the benefactors of the human race, became the objects of my detestation and abhorrence." T. Somerville, "My Own Life and Times", 264. Writing from Bombay in 1804 and looking back on the 1790s James Mackintosh, the author of "Vindiciae Gallicae", remarked "The witnesses of my emotion on the murder of General Dillon - on the 10th of August - on the massacre of the prisons - on the death of the king [in January 1793] are now no more. But the memory of what it is no hyperbole to call my sufferings, is at this moment fresh. As often as I call to mind... the indignation, the grief, the shame, which were not on my lips, but at the bottom of my heart, I feel an assured confidence of my own honesty of which no calumniator shall ever rob me." R.J. Mackintosh (ed), "Life of Sir James Mackintosh", 131.

297. The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer, 7-10 December 1792.

298. The Prospectus for the 'Edinburgh Gazetteer', which first appeared in mid-September 1792, declared that "It shall... be our care to rescue the public from those glaring misrepresentations of events upon the Continent, with which they have been abused." "Proposals for a Newspaper intituled The Edinburgh Gazetteer, to be published at Edinburgh, every Tuesday and Friday." Enclosure in Robert Watt to [H. Dundas?], 21 September 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland), RH2/4/64, f320.

they have preserved."²⁹⁹

Radical sympathy with and support for the French revolutionaries in their struggles against domestic traitors and foreign foes almost led them into the same trap as their English colleagues. On 21 September Robert Watt reported that the Edinburgh Friends of the People were about to agree "to write a congratulatory letter to the Jacobin Club in Paris for emancipating their nation from ye hands of Roy^l Tyranny" and "to consider ye propriety of petitioning Parl^t in conjunction w^t similar Societies in the nation to declare war against the combined powers now at war with France."³⁰⁰ In the event both the proposed petition and congratulatory letter were given up; the Minute Book of the London Corresponding Society recording that on 18 October 1792 "A Letter was read from the Associated Friends of the People in Edinburg, cautiously declining joining in the Address [to the French National Convention]."³⁰¹ It was reported that in Perth "some of the Members of the Association [of the Friends of the People] lately made a Proposal, that they should correspond with the National

299. N. Douglas, "Thoughts on Modern Politics", 214-216. Professor John Millar ascribed the events of August and September 1792 to the interference of the Austro-Prussian alliance in French affairs. "The manifesto", he wrote, "of the Duke of Brunswick appeared in Paris about the 7th of August 1792. Alarm and Terror seized the inhabitants; and, on the 10th of that month, produced a violent attack upon the king's palace, with the destruction of the Swiss guards. This was followed by the bloody tragedy exhibited on the 2^d of September, which appears to have been the effect of sudden rage and resentment excited by the progress of the danger." J. Millar. "Letters of Crito, on the causes, objects, and consequences, of the present war." (Edinburgh, 1796), 25.

300. Robert Watt to [H. Dundas?], 21 September 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland), RH2/4/64, ff318-319.

301. "Minute Book of the London Corresponding Society". British Library. Add. Ms 27812, f24. William Johnston explained in a letter to Thomas Hardy, the secretary of the London society, that the proposed address was likely to be "productive of mischief and misconstruction at home." A Goodwin, op cit, 245, quoting from the Treasury Solicitor's Papers in the Public Record Office. T.S.11/954/3498.

Assembly of France and had it not been for one or two of their more moderate Members, who saw and represented the Impropriety of the Measure, a Resolution to that Purpose would have been adopted."³⁰²

In Glasgow George Waddell, a "manufacturer" who held the office of secretary to the Grinston's Tavern society, "spoke to Mr. Muir about an address of congratulation to the French in imitation of Dundee, but... Mr. Muir disapproved of it,"³⁰³ and no such address was subsequently transmitted. The date of Waddell's conversation with Muir is not known, but it seems likely that the "address of congratulation" was proposed in response to General Dumouriez's stirring victories over the forces of "armed despotism."

Between September and November 1792 the military situation on the continent changed dramatically. The counter-revolutionary invasion of the Duke of Brunswick's combined Austrian and Prussian army was checked at Valmy on 20 September, and by the end of October all French territory had been liberated. The decisive defeat of the Austrian army at Jemappes, near Mons, on 6 November turned Brunswick's retreat into a rout and thereafter the French moved on to the offensive. On 14 November Dumouriez entered Brussels in triumph and by the end of the month the French army was poised to 'liberate' Britain's ally, the United Provinces. Thus in the course of two months the situation had been transformed. From being in an embattled position revolutionary France had turned the tables on its tyrannical enemies and seemed set to 'liberate' the rest of Europe. In France revolutionary leaders began to talk of extending the infant republic's border to the Rhine.

302. Anonymous Intelligence Report on Perth Radicalism. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH2/4/64, f341-343.

303. Howell, State Trials, XXIII, 175.

On 16 November, in violation of international law, the French Executive Council ordered that the river Scheldt be opened to shipping, and soon thereafter negotiations were entered into to extend the benefits of the revolution to Belgium. On 19 November the famous Edict of Fraternity was issued offering French assistance to all peoples who wished to regain their liberty, and on 27 November the French annexed Savoy.³⁰⁴ This dramatic turn of events had an electric effect on British radicals, whose anxiety was replaced by euphoria. The 'Edinburgh Gazetteer', having related Dumouriez's rout of the Austrian forces at Jemappes and his advance on Brussels, declared, on 16 November, that "The present state of Europe is such as ought to afford much pleasure to wise and good men."³⁰⁵ On 7 December the same newspaper enthused that

"Every patriotic heart must rejoice at the brilliant successes of the French in every quarter. Despotism has now been shook to the centre on the Continent and before the conclusion of next summer the Tree of Liberty will occupy the soil that has long been usurped by merciless tyranny."³⁰⁶

There can be little doubt that the 'Gazetteer' reflected the mood of the Scottish radical movement as a whole. However, the prudence which led the 'Gazetteer' to add that "England [i.e. Britain] alone will remain undisturbed, while viewing the emancipation of millions", prompted the radical societies to refrain from referring to continental affairs in their publications and to desist from sending congratulatory

304. This account, and that of the August Revolution and September Massacres above, are based on G. Lefebvre, *op cit*, 227-276.

305. The Edinburgh Gazetteer, 16 November 1792.

306. The Edinburgh Gazetteer, 7 December 1792.

addresses to France. Thus, in Scotland, radical support for the French Revolution was tempered by prudent caution. To declare openly, as did a number of English societies,³⁰⁷ radical feelings about the recent course of events in France was to invite the charge of 'Jacobinism'. The societies therefore maintained a discreet silence.

The dramatic developments on the continent, whatever the 'Gazetteer' claimed and the radical societies by their silence implied, had a most profound impact on Scotland. Dumouriez's triumphs and the consequent internationalisation of the revolution generated an immense wave of political optimism, not only within the radical societies but also among the wider community, which stimulated the growth of the radical movement, inspired riots in the cause of liberty, and ultimately created such an alarm within conservative circles as to unleash a vicious reaction. When the Stirling "Friends of Liberty and the People" assembled at the Saracen's Head Inn on 9 November 1792 they declared that

"This seems to be the period fixed by the Governor of the Universe for rousing the human race from that fatal delusion - that slavish fear - that servile submission, which have been but too successfully imposed upon them, by that mad ambition of lawless and assumed power. Mankind seem now to be convinced, that they were created for nobler ends than to be the slaves of princes, or the dupes of courts."³⁰⁸

307. See A. Goodwin, op cit, Appendix 2. "List of addresses from English reform societies to the French National Convention (November, December 1792)." See also the same author's discussion of these addresses, pp 241-255.

308. The Edinburgh Gazetteer, 16 November 1792.

Radical optimism was nothing new, but the optimism of late 1792 was of a different order from that of earlier times. Whig gentlemen and bourgeois radicals had enthused over the fall of the Bastille and the constitution of 1791, and speculated on the spread of 'enlightened ideas' of government across Europe, but it was the August Revolution of 1792, the defeat of Brunswick's army, and the spread of revolution beyond the borders of France which caught the imagination of the common people and persuaded them that the day of liberty had really dawned. This was indeed, as Paine had claimed, "an age of Revolutions in which everything may be looked for."³⁰⁹ William Peddie, an Edinburgh grocer and a member of the Canongate Friends of the People, wrote to his cousin, Robert Purves, an Eyemouth mason, on 21 November 1792, stating that "the Era of British Liberty approaches! and our Robbers will be made to reverence our rights", arguing that "it must end in a Republic", and speculating that in the event of civil war the French would send fraternal assistance to the British radicals.³¹⁰ An anonymous Paineite handbill, dateable to October-November 1792, trumpeted - "tremble therefore ye Satellites of despotism! now that the sun of knowledge has arisen and will (in spite of Imperial Ordounances)³¹¹ proceed with accelerated progress to irradiate the world and emancipate both Hemispheres."³¹² Even more extravagant were quasi-millennarian handbills, allegedly containing the prophecies of Thomas the Rhymer, which circulated in the west of Scotland in late

309. T. Paine. "Rights of Man, being an Answer to Mr. Burke's Attack on the French Revolution". (2nd edn, London, 1791), 171.

310. William Peddie to Robert Purves, 21 November 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH2/4/68, f69.

311. A reference to the counter revolutionary threats of the Hapsburg Empire and the King of Prussia explicit in the Declaration of Pillnitz, 27 August 1791, and the Manifesto of the Duke of Brunswick, 25 July 1792.

312. "Address to the Citizens". Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH2/4/64, f346.

1792. The medieval Jacobin had, it was claimed, prophesied that after a "violent struggle" Scotland's liberty would be made "perfect", that after terrible convulsions in Church and State the military, civil, and religious despots would flee in shame, and that thereafter there would be no more wars, trade would flourish, and "true religion and an universal love to mankind shall be established unto the end of the world."³¹³ Alexander Wilson, the Paisley weaver poet and radical, hailed the approaching democratic triumph somewhat more soberly. He wrote, in November 1792,

"The power of clergy, wylie tykes,
Is unco fast declining;
And courtiers' craft, like snaw aff dykes
Melts when the sun is shining;
'Auld Monarchy, wi' cruel paw,
Her dying pains is gnawing;
While democracy, trig and braw,
Is through a' Europe crawling
Fu' crouse this day."³¹⁴

This wave of optimism powered the rapid growth of the Scottish radical movement in the last quarter of 1792. It was this period which saw the formation of the great majority of the radical societies and the most spectacular increases in their membership. In large part the great expansion of the movement in this period was owing to the fact that between them the revolutionaries of 10 August and Dumouriez's army had proved that democracy could be won and secured in Old Europe despite massive opposition. The inspirational effects of 10 August and

313. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH2/4/65, f162.

314. Rev. A.B. Grosart, op cit, II, 75.

Jemappes can hardly be overstated. As a direct result of the thrilling developments on the continent many Scots of relatively humble rank came to believe that the democratic triumph was both inevitable and imminent. The course of events and Paine's 'Rights of Man' had taught them that radical change was desirable, but now for the first time they really believed that it could be achieved. Men rushed to form and join radical societies because, as G.A. Williams put it, "they saw the future and it worked."³¹⁵

Unfortunately for the radicals not all of this enthusiasm could be channelled into their societies and directed along the moderate lines sagely mapped out by their leadership. November saw a series of political riots across Scotland which, by compromising the movement and accentuating the alarmism of the propertied classes, led to a conflict for which the movement was ill-prepared. In early November the arrival of the detested Henry Dundas at his Perthshire hunting lodge was greeted in unmistakeable fashion. His attendance at a "great entertainment" in Crieff roused the 'mob' to fury. An effigy was constructed, brought before the ballroom, given a mock trial, sentenced to execution, paraded through the streets where it was subjected to "every mark of derision", and returned to its place of 'trial' where it was committed to the flames.³¹⁶ Dundas' expected

315. G.A. Williams, op cit, 70.

316. The Edinburgh Gazetteer, 16 November 1792. See also Archibald Stewart to Sir William Murray of Ochtertyre, 23 January 1793. SRO Melville Papers GD51/9/39, f2. Stewart wrote that "Having been deceived by the speches of aminorsty [sic] in the British parliment" a group of apprentices, of whom he was one, burned an effigy of Dundas "in Crieff last harvest." He added that "I have asked forgiveness of God alredy and now ask forgiveness of Mr. Dundass", but did not explain what had brought about this repentance.

attendance at the central event of the Perthshire social calendar, the Perth Hunt, prompted the citizenry of Perth to prepare "a very warm reception". Attempts were made via the Perth Friends of the People to dissuade the rioters from holding their intended demonstration, but to no avail. Dundas took good advice and returned to Edinburgh without attending the Hunt Ball, but the 'riot' went ahead in his absence. On the evening of 6 November "a very numerous assembly" escorted an effigy of 'Harry the Ninth', which had been "fitted up in a masterly style", through the principal streets of the city. The effigy was "hanged at the common place of execution" before being brought to the ballroom where it was set-alight.³¹⁷ Meanwhile the local gentry and aristocracy were attempting to make their way from the George Inn, where the "ordinaries" were held, to the ballroom. As they moved through the crowd they were subjected to insults and "even the best of them had to walk, hat in hand, and make obeisance to the Majesty of the People."³¹⁸ Home Secretary Dundas' son, Robert Saunders Dundas, "received special notice", and when the Duke of Atholl appeared the crowd cried out - "There goes citizen Murray, Black Jock who sold the Highlanders. To the guillotine with him, that he may receive his deserts."³¹⁹ The

317. The Edinburgh Gazetteer, 16 November 1792, and The Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligencer, 9-12 November 1792. George Penny remembered that "In a short time, the street was in an uproar, and the effigy made its appearance, mounted on a long pole, while the air rung with the shouts of delighted thousands. After parading the town, the crowd halted in front of the George Inn, that the nobility present might have an opportunity of witnessing the exhibition. An inflammatory harangue having been delivered by one of the leaders, fire was set to the effigy; the belly of which being filled with combustibles, and the head with gunpowder, poor Harry, in the face of his enemies, ended his career in a luminous manner, and with a good report." G. Penny, op cit, 71.

318. G. Penny, op cit, 70.

319. IBID, 71. 'The Glasgow Advertiser' reported that "The Duke offered them money, which was refused, and they archly replied, 'That he must not think of buying and selling them as he did his regiment, (aluding to the Atholl Highlanders),&c.'" The Duke of Atholl claimed that only about one hundred took part in the demonstration and denied that he had offered money to the demonstrators. Atholl Papers. Blair Atholl. Box 65. Bundle 10. Letter 84.

'Caledonian Mercury' reported that 'citizen Murray' "in a very prudent manner, humoured them, and cried out 'Liberty and Equality.'"³²⁰ The same newspaper reported on 12 November that since the riot "peace and harmony has subsisted in the town", but, as we shall see, appearances were deceptive.

Four days after the Perth 'mob' informed the political manager of Scotland and the local gentry what it thought of them, the Langholm (Dumfriesshire) 'patriots' decided "to have a day of public rejoicing on account of the late success of the French."³²¹ On 10 November a bonfire was set up at the Cross of Langholm, round which the members of the local "Revolution Club", "to the number of twelve or thirteen only", gathered to drink seditious toasts and fire a feu de joie "amidst... the acclamations of the mob". Their toasts were "Success to the French Revolution", "George the Third and last King", and "Liberty and Equality to all the World." In the evening the 'patriots' illuminated their windows in celebration of Dumouriez's victories, and the Langholm 'mob' decided that the rest of the inhabitants should join in the celebrations. A crowd assembled and marched through the town to the beat of a drum ordering a general illumination and breaking the windows of those who did not comply.³²² A full investigation, directed by the Lord Advocate himself,³²³ led to the arrest of three members of the Revolution Club, but when the warrants of commitment against them were

320. The Caledonian Mercury, 12 November 1792.

321. William Keir to the Duke of Buccleugh, 13 November 1792. The Buccleugh Muniments GD224/657/1, f101.

322. IBID.

323. The Duke of Buccleugh wrote to William Keir, 6 December 1792, stating that "The Lord Advocate has at last determined that the Sheriff, Mr. Craigie, should go to Langholm to try the rioters some time towards the end of this month." SRO. The Buccleugh Muniments GD224/655/2, f106.

issued "these rascals attempted to raise another riot in the town", boasting that "they could raise as many men to support them, as would drive the Justices out of the Town". Wisely however they desisted from such a foolhardy action and gave themselves up.³²⁴ The trial before the Dumfries Sheriff Court on 22 January 1793 resulted in the three accused, a flax-dresser, a mason, and a tailor, being found guilty of drinking seditious toasts and riotous behaviour. Two were sentenced to four months imprisonment and ordered to find caution of 600 merks for their good behaviour for two years, while the third was sentenced to two months imprisonment and ordered to find caution of 300 merks for his good behaviour for one year.³²⁵

No sooner had the disturbances died down in Langholm than Dundee expressed a "fancy of a tree of liberty."³²⁶ The Dundee disturbances, which lasted for over a week, caused the authorities special worry on account of the mob's seeming willingness to connect economic and political grievances and aspirations. News of Dumouriez's decisive victory at Jemappes having arrived in Dundee a crowd gathered in the High Street on the evening of 16 November and erected a tree of liberty "with a Lantern suspended to it, & a Label with the words Liberty & Equality, No Sinecures."³²⁷ This demonstration of international radical solidarity was rudely interrupted by a passing group of drunken "young gentlemen" who pulled the tree down.³²⁸ The

324. William Keir to the Duke of Buccleugh, 19 December 1792. SRO The Buccleugh Muniments. GD224/657/1, f105.

325. The Glasgow Courier, 28 January 1793.

326. Alexander Riddoch to R. Grahame, 24 November 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) Supplementary. RH2/4/207, f396.

327. John Fyffe to Robert Graham, 25 November 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) Supplementary. RH2/4/207, ff413-418.

328. Alexander Riddoch to Robert Dundas, 8 December 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH2/4/66, ff258-259.

crowd dispersed but determined to avenge the insult and "next morning, several advertisements were stuck up, stating, that it was intended to burn one of the gentlemen in effigy" on Tuesday evening.³²⁹ Meanwhile on the morning of Monday 19 November a delegation arrived at the house of Lord Provost Alexander Riddoch complaining "that a ship from Berwick had been in the harbour of Dundee for 16 days and that the Custom House Officers had refused the Master permission to unload his cargo - being understood to be contrary to a clause in the Corn Law." The delegation reported "that a Mob was assembling to take out the meal by force", but Riddoch begged them to endeavour to dissuade the mob, assuring them "that by Wednesday I should have authority to unload the meal."³³⁰ Tuesday evening saw a crowd "of some hundreds" assembled to avenge themselves on the gentlemen who had pulled down the tree of liberty, and on the local customs and excise officers. Having re-erected their tree of liberty they marched through the streets, preceded by a "stout man" carrying a flaming tar barrel, "crying out liberty and Equality" and carrying effigies "of some persons obnoxious to them."³³¹ Having burned the effigies, they attacked the house of Mr. Webster, the father of one of the drunken "young gentlemen", destroying the gate and railings and breaking the windows.³³² They then proceeded to wreak their vengeance on the houses of the local excise

329. The Caledonian Mercury, 1 December 1792.

330. Alexander Riddoch to Robert Dundas, 8 December 1792. Loc cit. A dispensation to unload the meal was in fact granted by the Board of Customs in Edinburgh. George Dempster to William Pulteney, 1 December 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH2/4/66, f203.

331. John Fyffe to Robert Graham, 25 November 1792. Loc cit.

332. Alexander Riddoch to Robert Graham, 21 November 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) Supplementary, RH2/4/207, ff373-374.

officials,³³³ before setting the town bells a-ringing.³³⁴ Lord Provost Riddoch intervened at this point and persuaded them to stop ringing the bells.³³⁵ The demonstration however continued, with the crowd constructing a bonfire "which was kept burning all night" and parading "a tree around it which they called the tree of liberty."³³⁶ The Magistracy were virtually powerless and requested the aid of the military,³³⁷ while James Mitchell, the Supervisor of Excise, reported that "to such a hight has threats and insults been carried to day [Thursday, 22 November], that the officers dare not do their duty with effect and if things continue to go on as they have begun there will soon be an end of Charging the Duties of Excise in Dundee."³³⁸ The second tree of liberty was taken down by order of the magistracy on Wednesday evening, but on Friday 23 November a crowd broke into "Mr. Jobson's Shrubery and took one of his best trees which they fairly planted in the center of the Cross and lighted it up with Candles" and

333. James Mitchell to the Secretary of the Board of Excise, 22 November 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) Supplementary, RH2/4/207, ff389-391.

334. Alexanxder Riddoch to Robert Dundas, 8 December 1792. Loc cit.

335. IBID. Riddoch's influence with the crowd may have been owing to his promises to secure a dispensation for the unloading of meal, but it is interesting to note that Thomson and Maclaren state that when the tree of liberty was erected Lord Provost Riddoch "was compelled to walk three times round the tree, and shout - 'Liberty and Equality for ever!'" J. Thomson and J. Maclaren, "The History of Dundee", 136.

336. Alexander Riddoch to Robert Dundas, 8 December 1792. Loc cit.

337. Alexander Riddoch wrote to Robert Graham on 21 November 1792 stating that he considered it "absolutely necessary that Military be immediately sent here." Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) Supplementary RH2/4/207, ff374-375.

338. James Mitchell to the Secretary of the Board of Excise, 22 November 1792. Loc cit.

decorated it with apples.³³⁹ The tree remained in position until Sunday 25 November when the Lord Provost ordered the Town Officers to pull it down. Further disturbances were prevented by the arrival on Monday of two troops of dragoons.³⁴⁰ Thereafter calm returned to the city.

The very day the dragoons rode into Dundee a crowd in Perth celebrated the entry of Dumouriez into Brussels in what was rapidly becoming the customary fashion. A tree of liberty was erected at the Cross and its branches decorated with lighted candles, while nearby a large bonfire was kindled to shouts of "Liberty and Equality" and demands for the abolition of monarchy and aristocracy from the "surrounding multitudes". The magistrates wisely made no attempt to interfere as the crowd ordered a general illumination, broke the windows of any who dared to ignore the command, and rang the church bells throughout the night.³⁴¹ However, unlike Dundee, order was

339. James Mitchell to Adam Pearson, 25 November 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) Supplementary RH2/4/207, ff409-411. Mitchell added that "The officers of Excise were rather less insulted on Saturday than they were the two preceding days, from which I flatter myself the outcry will dwindle away by degrees, - though papers inscribed with their favourite exclamation are still thrown in their [i.e. the excisemen's] way. I found no less than three of these papers, put in a broke pane of the window of my Stable this morning, all of the same handwriting, and each containing these words 'No King, No Gauger, Liberty.'"

340. Alexander Riddoch to Robert Dundas, 8 December 1792. Loc cit.

341. This account of the second Perth riot is based upon 'The Caledonian Mercury', 29 November 1792, 'The Glasgow Courier', 29 November 1792, and G. Penny, op cit, 72.

quickly restored without the need for any troops.³⁴² Perth's calm was but superficial. David Smyth, the Sheriff of Perth, reported that such was the strength of republican sentiment in the town, it was "not uncommon in the west end... which is mostly inhabited by them [i.e. the radicals] to hear the Boys crying 'Liberty, Equality, and no king',"³⁴³ while a Perth loyalist averred on 15 December that "The people in this country are gone quite mad about Liberty and Equality... The Lower Class of people talk of nothing but Liberty and Equality - No Dundas, No Bishops, and No King. Nothing but a Republic for us."³⁴⁴

Elsewhere too democratic enthusiasm gave rise to demonstrations. The Sheriff of Fife reported that disturbances had taken place at Strathmiglo and Auchtermuchty, where trees of liberty had been erected and the church bells rung.³⁴⁵ On 29 November Susan Bean, a self-appointed government informer, related that "the tree of liberty was put up at Stonehaven,"³⁴⁶ while a correspondent of William Adam,

342. The Sheriff of Perth wrote to Henry Dundas, 3 December 1792, stating that with regard to the riot "last week" it "appears there is no reason to think that it originated from anything but the wanton frolick of some idle persons and of those against whom any thing appears there is not one above twenty years of age." He added that the Magistrates, Merchant Guild, and Trades Incorporations had organised a guard system to prevent further outrages, stating that "in these Measures even the most violent of the reformers have concurred as readily as the other Inhabitants", and concluded that there was therefore no need for the authorities to send troops. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH2/4/66, ff194-195.

343. David Smyth to Henry Dundas, 24 November 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH2/4/65, ff86-87.

344. Anonymous to Alexander Tod, 15 December 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH2/4/67, f438.

345. Claud Boswell to Robert Dundas, 9 December 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH2/4/66, f260.

346. Mrs. Susan Bean to [H. Dundas?], 29 November 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH2/4/65, f156.

the conservative Whig MP, reported on 23 November that scenes similar to those at Dundee had taken place at Forfar "where the inhabitants of the town were joined in great numbers by people from Glamis & Kirriemuir."³⁴⁷ Aberdeen too had been affected by the "tree of liberty business", but there to the relief of the authorities it "ended in nothing".³⁴⁸

The societies of the Friends of the People attempted to disassociate themselves from all such "riotous and tumultuous proceedings." The Dundee Friends of the Constitution met on 21 November, during the 'tree of liberty' disturbances, and resolved -

"That, while we avow ourselves to be warm friends of Liberty, and zealous advocates for the Rights of Man, we must account those who countenance riotous and disorderly meetings, the most fatal enemies of Liberty, and of the best interests of Society. Liberty cannot be enjoyed without Law, and an exact obedience to the Law. Without Government and without Law, even Liberty,

347. William Robertson to William Adam, 23 November 1792. Blair Adam Muniments. General Correspondence, 1792, A-Z.

348. Lord Provost George Auldjo to Lord Adam Gordon, 5 December 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH2/4/66, ff235-236. Auldjo was much more worried by a seamen's strike. The Aberdeen seamen, following the example of those at South Shields, Leith, and elsewhere, had gone on strike for an increase in pay. Having refused an offer of 7/6d extra per month, they held out for an increase of 15/- and enforced their claim by preventing the loading or unloading of cargoes and by unrigging ships which were about to sail. Auldjo asked that soldiers and a ship of war be sent to Aberdeen, but the request was refused. The corresponding strike at Leith was much less acrimonious and more easily solved. The Leith sailors and ships carpenters struck work on 14 November, but by the 17th the intervention of the magistrates in their customary role as mediators had secured a settlement. 'The Caledonian Mercury', 15 and 17 November, 1792. There was some fear that the radicals would exploit the sailors' grievances to their own advantage and Lord Dundonald, for one, asked the Lord Advocate to consider to "what farther lengths they [i.e. the seamen] may go, when spurred on by Incendiaries with the words Freedom, Equality, Rights of Man or the People, no Impress!" Lord Dundonald to the Lord Advocate, 19 December 1792. NLS Melville Papers MSS6, ff44-45. In the event these fears were unfounded. The radicals, as has been noted, showed no interest in exploiting industrial disputes and employing industrial action to further their cause.

precious as it is, would become a curse. It would expose the peace and property and life of every individual to the lawless and the profligate, of whom there are many in every great community. True Liberty secures to every citizen the quiet enjoyments of his just rights.

It is his preservation from the hand of power. But there is no power so terrible as that of a lawless mob. - Their determinations are cruel, and their executions immediate.

They make light of the property and peace of every man who happens to offend their worthless ringleaders."³⁴⁹

The radical societies' objection to political rioting was twofold. On the one hand mobs were regarded as frighteningly anarchic forces which endangered liberty and property, and on the other hand they were seen as politically counter-productive. When Thomas Muir defended Alexander Lockie, one of the King's Birthday rioters, he stated "that when mobs were set on foot, in order to obtain redress of grievances... they defeated the cause they meant to serve; as it was not by riots and tumults that the Legislature would be induced to pay attention to remonstrances."³⁵⁰ Muir, his biographer tells us, "was apprehensive of the Scylla and Charybdis, on which the cause of reason and humanity might be lost, the intemperance and puerile indiscretion of the enthusiast, on the one hand, and the villainous seduction of the hired assassin on the other,"³⁵¹ and like other leaders of the movement he

349. The Caledonian Mercury, 1 December 1792. It should be noted that the published resolutions of radical societies frequently included denunciations and repudiations of rioting. The great majority of these resolutions were published in the period October 1792 to February 1793.

350. The Caledonian Mercury, 19 July 1792.

351. The Glasgow Magazine, October 1795, 162.

rarely lost an opportunity to impress upon radical audiences the need to avoid tumultuous proceedings.³⁵² All members of the Glasgow Association of the Friends of the People had to subscribe a Declaration which stated that "I shall discountenance, and endeavour to suppress all sedition, riots, or disorder, which bad men may attempt to excite, under the Pretence of Reform, and which others as bad may encourage in the view of preventing it."³⁵³

There is no reliable evidence to link the societies of the Friends of the People with the political disturbances of November 1792. Sheriff-Depute Smyth reported, 24 November 1792, that investigations into the Perth "disturbances" of 6 November had revealed that the materials from which the effigy of Dundas had been constructed were supplied by James Wylie, a Perth merchant and the President of the local Friends of the People.³⁵⁴ However the 'evidence' against Wylie does not appear to have been sufficient to warrant prosecution. Moreover, Wylie's alleged participation, however indirect, is hard to square with the fact that the Perth Friends of the People co-operated with the magistrates in restoring order³⁵⁵ and with the fact that when a mass meeting of the citizenry of Perth was held on 18 December, George Meliss, a leading radical, "recommended to the people to avoid all disorder and tumult as very pernicious in themselves."³⁵⁶ When the 1st

352. See for example, Howell, *State Trials*, XXIII, 138, 146, 178-179.

353. "Resolutions and Plan of the Society of the Friends of the Constitution and of the People." Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH2/4/64, ff371-372.

354. David Smyth to Henry Dundas, 24 November 1792. Loc cit.

355. David Smyth to Henry Dundas, 3 December 1792. Loc cit.

356. David Smyth to Henry Dundas, 20 December 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH2/4/67, ff440-443.

Convention agreed to Captain Johnston's motion that "it be recommended to each society of the Friends of the People to expunge from the roll of its members, the name or names of any individual or individuals who may have acted illegally, tumultuously, or in any way to the disturbance of the public peace"³⁵⁷ it was doing more than merely attempting to answer conservative charges that the movement deliberately fomented disturbances. The convention's resolution reaffirmed the movement's sincere commitment to orderly and constitutional agitation and its equally sincere detestation of mob violence.

The attempts of the Friends of the People to distance themselves from the disturbances of November 1792 were to little avail. Conservative opinion held the movement responsible for every tree of liberty erected, every window broken, and every plebeian insult to the ruling order. A loyalist pamphleteer noted the radicals' claim to be "the enemies of mobs" and asked

"But how does their dislike of them appear? In their labouring to fill your minds with discontent, jealousy and rage; with an opinion that you are wronged, fleeced and oppressed; with every feeling, in short, to make you desperate and impatient, and to move you to excesses."³⁵⁸

The charge was not that the Friends of the People participated in riots, but that they deliberately encouraged them by stirring up discontent. As the Freeholders, Commissioners of Supply, and Heritors of Dumbartonshire put it at a meeting of 29 December 1792, -

357. Meikle, op cit, 254.

358. Anon. "A Few Plain Questions to the Working People of Scotland." (N.P., 1792), 13.

"various efforts have been lately made by wicked and designing men, falsely calling themselves the Friends of the People, to spread sedition in some parts of this kingdom, which evidently tends to endanger the very existence of our excellent constitution, by promoting riots and insurrection."³⁵⁹

The radical leadership were portrayed in loyalist publications as unscrupulous desperadoes who sought to achieve the wealth and position which their talents were unequal to by spreading discontent and thus fomenting revolution and anarchy. The Rev. Andrew Hunter (1743-1809), the minister of Iron Church, Edinburgh, and a leading member of the Popular Party, informed his parishioners on 16 December 1792 that "the cry about abuses in government and the need for reformation in the state, is raised by worthless and seditious persons, who have either squandered away their own fortunes in vice and folly, or who have been disappointed in schemes of ambition, and are eager by such means to raise themselves to situations of honour and affluence." Such men, he argued, had no concern for "the good of the nation; though by warm professions of regard to it, and specious representations of supposed or real grievances... they are often too successful in spreading a flame of discontent with the rulers among the people, and exciting them to acts of disobedience and sedition." The radicals, he warned, were "false reformers, who would hazard the order and peace of society for their own theoretical plans of government, or the gratification of their private passions."²⁶⁰ This theme was also pursued by the Moderate

359. The Caledonian Mercury, 3 January 1793.

360. All quotes are taken from A. Hunter "The Duties of Subjects. A sermon preached in the Iron Church, Edinburgh, December 16th, 1792". (Edinburgh, 1793), 7.

minister of Inveresk, the Rev. Dr. Alexander Carlyle, who claimed, on 9 December 1792, that the design of the radical "master spirits" was "to excite the minds of the people to commotion, to tumult, to revolt and rebellion, that they may lay in ruins the goodly fábric of this government."³⁶¹ He explained that these "master spirits" were "Not those who have either much character or property to lose, but the discontented, the disappointed, or ambitious, who are devoid of talents to gratify their passions, unless it be in times of confusion."³⁶² These evil men, he argued, intended to achieve their objective by raising "an ignorant, an unruly and desperate mob, which all great cities can furnish, who, having nothing to lose, delight in scenes of riot and confusion."³⁶³ Such mobs, he added, were to be employed as "an engine that has no will or direction of its own, to perpetrate their wicked designs, and through rapine, havock, and blood, to overturn religion, law and the ancient constitution, that, under the pretence of a free democracy, they may acquire dominion and wealth

361. A. Carlyle. "A Sermon on the Death of Sir David Dalrymple, Bart., Lord Hailes; from Eccles. VIII.3. Preached in the Church of Inveresk, on Sunday the 9th of December 1792. By Alexr. Carlyle, D.D., F.R.S.E. Chaplain to His Majesty, & Minister of that Parish. With an Address to the Congregation suited to the Circumstances of the Times." (Edinburgh, 1792), 30.

362. IBID, 31-32.

363. IBID, 32.

to themselves."³⁶⁴

Conservatives attempted to justify the charge of revolutionary intentions against the Friends of the People by pointing to the political principles advocated in the publications disseminated by or closely associated with the radicals. The Rev. Stevenson Macgill, for example, complained that "There have been of late circulated through this country, with industrious care, pamphlets whose whole tendency is to infuse into us discontents [and] lead us to break the bonds of peace and order, and precipitate us into anarchy and confusion."³⁶⁵ In conservative eyes the constitutionalist claims of the movement looked somewhat disingenuous when viewed alongside the Paineite literature that was being distributed across the

364. IBID, 32. Conservative pamphleteers adopted the same arguments. One such stated that "Your [i.e. the Friends of the People's] Leaders have been described as men of weak hearts and bad hearts, who, through their giddiness, ignorance, or stupidity, have found themselves incapable of rising in the army, at the bar, in the church, or in the profession of medicine; or who have, through the same means, been unsuccessful in the transactions of trade and manufacture. These men have self-conceit sufficient to attribute to the circumstances of the country what every person else ascribes to their want of merit. It is natural enough for men, who want valour and military skill which might raise them in the army, to be willing to prompt the violence of the mob. He who has laboured in vain to acquaint himself with the laws of his country, may well desire their abolition. The clergyman who has violated the decorum of the clerical character, and neglected the functions of his office, will naturally desire to throw off all the restraints of religion. The bankrupt will persuade himself, that, in the case of civil commotion, he may repair his broken fortunes. All these men have the same interest in exciting sedition, and in throwing our state into confusion, which thieves and robbers have in setting an house on fire, that they may find an opportunity of theft and pillage." Anon. "Facts, Reflections, and Queries, submitted to the consideration of the Associated Friends of the People." (Edinburgh, 1792), 27-28.

365. S. Macgill. "The Spirit of the Times : considered in an address to the people of Eastwood." (Glasgow, 1792), 5.

country.³⁶⁶ The complexity of the radicals' response to the 'Rights of Man' was lost on such alarmist observers who equated keen interest in the work with full and unqualified approval of all its contents. Moreover, conservatives found further evidence to substantiate their allegations in the radicals' attitude towards recent developments in France. The failure to condemn the revolution of 10 August and the Terror which followed it was sufficient reason, in the opinion of the Rev. Dr. Thomas Somerville, to conclude that the radical societies approved of both and intended, behind the mask of reform, to introduce such revolutionary horrors into Britain.³⁶⁷ To approve of both the revolution of 1789 and that of 1792, he argued, proved that the radicals were unprincipled revolutionaries. The Friends of the People wished to pull down the constitution, he stated,

"not to rear a better but to enrich themselves in the wreck of national property. Approving of all revolutions promiscuously, whatever be their source or aim, they act in perfect conformity with their own principles, or rather want of all principle, in expressing the same satisfaction with the second French revolution as with the first."³⁶⁸

366. The Rev. Thomas Macknight, the minister of Trinity Church in Leith, wrote - "That such a spirit of change and anarchy, hostile to the British Constitution, really exists in this country, has, indeed, been strenuously denied. But the mere assertions of men interested to facilitate its progress, will... not prove, to the conviction of those who have any political discernment, the non-existence of what addresses, with such art, the corrupt passions of mankind, and holds forth to the needy and unprincipled so tempting a lure." T. Macknight. "The Means of National Security Considered as a Ground of Thankfulness to Divine Providence. A Discourse Addressed to the Volunteers of Leith, on the 23RD Nov. 1794; and Published at their Request." (Edinburgh, 1795), 3. Macknight's scriptures were not intended to refer specifically to the situation as it existed in 1794, but rather to the nature of the radical threat from its beginnings in 1792.

367. T. Somerville. "The Effects of the French Revolution, with respect to the interests of Humanity, Liberty, Religion, and Morality." (Edinburgh, 1793), 14-18.

368. T. Somerville. "Observations on the Constitution and Present State of Britain." (Edinburgh, 1793), 63.

Conservative writers were not slow to argue or insinuate that the British radicals and the French revolutionaries shared a common ideology of revolution. The frequent juxtaposition in conservative literature of criticisms of the radicals' political principles with descriptions of the horrors of revolutionary France was intended to illustrate where those principles would lead if they were applied in Britain.³⁶⁹ To the conservative mind revolutionary France served as a sort of political laboratory in which radical ideas could be tested in practice. The result of the 'experiment' confirmed conservative theory. Democratic principles, they concluded, led inevitably to anarchy, irreligion, and the spoliation of property.³⁷⁰ Even more alarming to conservative observers than a shared ideology was the apparent evidence of an international revolutionary conspiracy. The exportation of revolution into territories surrounding France, the Edict of Fraternity, and the congratulatory addresses of the English societies convinced many of the existence of such a conspiracy. That the Scottish societies did not send addresses to France was ignored. Conservatives read Britain for England and, in so doing, clearly implied that the Scots radicals secretly held the same views as those openly expressed in England and that they were therefore equally 'Jacobinical' but more calculating than their English counterparts.

369. See, for example, the anonymous loyalist pamphlet "A Few Plain Questions to the Working People of Scotland" (NP, 1792). The author of this pamphlet, having defended the status quo against the criticisms of its radical opponents, argued that in France "to be sure, every man has freedom of voting in all things. And along with it what has he more? The freedom of being at the mercy in all things of all the miscreants in the kingdom. The freedom of having his house burned, his goods plundered, his wife and children knocked on the head, and himself tugged up at a lamp-post, without judge or trial, or time to say his prayers. And all at the instigation of any scoundrel, who dislikes his face, or who owes him money, or has taken a fancy to his effects. These are the precious fruits of the French reform. Is it possible that any creature, not in Bedlam, or fit for it, can think such a state desirable." *IBID*, 9-10.

370. See, for example, W. Combe's pamphlet "A Word in Season to the Traders and Manufactures of Great Britain" (NP, 1792), 5-7.

The Rev. Dr. George Hill (1750-1819), the Principal of St. Mary's College, St. Andrews, the leader of the Moderate Party, and a close political ally of Henry Dundas, argued that the international designs of the French revolutionaries were assisted by the British radicals who circulated "seditious publications in an attempt to pervert the understanding and to poison the minds of the people", attempted "to inveigle the uninformed into associations, the deep designs of which they did not penetrate", and corresponded with the French Convention. This correspondence, he stated, convinced the French that "'the hearts of the British people are with us, their rulers only are against us'," and provided the background to the Edict of Fraternity which was intended to produce either an invitation from the radicals or disturbances which might have acted as a pretext for a French invasion.³⁷¹ Hill's fellow Moderate, the Rev. William Porteous (1735-1812), the minister of the Wynd Church in Glasgow, adopted a similar line in argument. The radicals, he argued, not content with organising sedition at home,

"had recourse to our ancient foes, to them they misrepresented the state of this country. Pretending to believe that their own opinions were the opinions of the people, they solicited the aid and courted the friendship of France. That intoxicated people listened with rapture to the Siren's song, and, like the ungrateful sons of liberty at home, they defied our power."³⁷²

371. G. Hill. "Instructions afforded by the Present War, to the People of Great Britain. A Sermon preached at St. Andrews, on Thursday the 18th of April 1793. By George Hill, D.D., F.R.S.E. Principal of St. Mary's College in the University of St. Andrews". (Edinburgh, 1793), 6-9.

372. W. Porteous. "The Good Old Way Recommended". (Glasgow, 1793), 12.

When, on 13 December 1792, Henry Dundas attempted to persuade the House of Commons that the British radicals were intent upon introducing French style government into Britain it is probable that he spoke for most Scottish conservatives. Dundas argued that

"The example of France had been held out for imitation, not only with regard to their object, but likewise with regard to the means of attaining that object.... Those societies... held a correspondence with France, for the purpose of overturning the constitution, and even sent members to Paris to procure instructions... The national convention had shown themselves disposed to countenance every complaint of grievances from the discontented and factious in this country... Was this, then, not a time for alarm, when persons wished to subvert the constitution in conjunction with foreign powers? He alluded to the late decree by which the convention declared their intention to support all who should call for their assistance in asserting their freedom."³⁷³

By November 1792 conservative anxiety at the growing radical menace was turning to alarm. That alarm was the product not of any single development, but rather of a combination of developments. To the conservative mind the rapid growth of the Friends of the People, the widespread dissemination of Paine's 'Rights of Man' and other inflammatory publications, the growing politicisation of the lower orders, the riots, the emergence of a victorious France as the champion of international revolution, and the forging of suspicious links between the English radical societies and the French revolutionaries,

373. Parl. Hist, XXX, 46.

collectively posed an unparalleled and fearsome threat to political stability, social order, and property. To many it seemed that Scotland, and Britain as a whole, were slipping down the slope to democratic revolution. On 13 December Henry Dundas informed the House of Commons that "During the last six weeks he had spent in Scotland, he had been visited from every quarter, by the great manufacturers, by magistrates, and by gentlemen... all expressing their alarm at the situation of the country; and requesting the interference of government, to check a spirit which threatened such dangerous consequences."³⁷⁴ From all available evidence it appears that Dundas accurately reported the state of opinion among the Scottish governing classes. William Robertson, an opposition Whig who had no obvious reason to exaggerate the situation, wrote to William Adam on 8 December stating that "The alarm here [i.e. Scotland] is great."³⁷⁵ Few seem to have believed that the situation was already out of control, but equally it seems many if not most gentlemen of property considered immediate action against the radicals to be essential. The mood was perhaps best summed up by George Home who wrote to Patrick Home of Wedderburn on 25 November stating that "At present the Mob can be repressed, in a little time they may be able to carry all before them."³⁷⁶

The fear of democratic "convulsion" drove the bourgeoisie in general and the burgh reformers in particular into the reactionary camp. George Home reported that the "master manufacturers", who had first championed reform, had "in many places", but "particularly about Glasgow... now come to repent of it." The "middle class", he added, "foresee that any Convulsion must produce unavoidable ruin to them, and

374. IBID, 45.

375. William Robertson to William Adam, 8 December 1792. Blair Adam Muniments. General Correspondence, 1792, A-Z.

376. George Home to Patrick Home of Wedderburn, 25 November 1792. SRO Home of Wedderburn Manuscripts. GD 267/1/16.

are now doing everything in their power to check and restrain that Spirit of Sedition they have raised."³⁷⁷ On Tayside the bourgeois reaction was particularly marked. Mrs. Susan Bean reported that in Montrose "Any person of character that joined the Borough reform before keeps off now from joining this society [i.e. the Friends of the People] as they see the channel the vulgar run in",³⁷⁸ while Robert Graham wrote that "I cannot learn that a single individual of respectability is ostensibly connected with any of their levelling societies, all those who were so on account of the Burrough Reform having withdrawn with the strongest expressions of their dislike to the doctrines now broaching."³⁷⁹ The growing alarmism of the bourgeoisie had frightening implications for the radicals and great efforts were therefore made to convince them that there was nothing to be alarmed about. As George Home pointed out, one of the reasons why the radical societies published resolutions deprecating "violent measures" and recommending "peace, good order, and moderation" was to "restore the Confidence of the middle Class [and] get them to unite in an application to Parliament to render Elections more popular."³⁸⁰ Failure to restore that confidence would have at least two serious implications for the movement. In the first place the movement would be deprived of much valuable support in its planned application to Parliament, rendering the attainment of its objective very unlikely, and, in the second place, its bourgeois and Foxite Whig leadership

377. IBID.

378. Mrs. Susan Bean to [H. Dundas?], 24 November 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH2/4/65, ff33-34.

379. Robert Graham to [H. Dundas?], 22 November 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) Supplementary. RH2/4/207, ff376-380.

380. George Home to Patrick Home of Wedderburn, 25 November 1792. Loc cit.

would be placed in an untenable position. Unless the support of the middle class could be obtained the leadership would find itself leading a movement dominated by a quasi-Paineite plebeian rank and file committed to nothing less than the unacceptable policy of universal manhood suffrage. The last two months of 1792 represented the leadership's last chance to persuade the burgh reformers and their constituents, the urban bourgeoisie, to offer their support to the parliamentary reform movement and to convince the movement that compromises should be made to secure that support. As we shall see they failed on both counts.

The growing alarm of the burgh reformers was shared by their more conservative colleagues in the county reform movement. Shortly before the county reform delegates assembled in convention on 12 December 1792 Robert Fergusson of Craigdarroch published a short pamphlet urging the delegates to present a reform bill to Parliament without delay and without sending it first to the counties for their individual consideration, and arguing that such a reform was necessary to unite the propertied classes behind the constitution. He claimed that there was massive support for county reform, and argued that

"Government must be sensible how important it is, at this moment, to unite the people of Scotland. In these times, it is somewhat to be feared that men, who come forward with just and moderate demands, may, if repulsed, run to the opposite extreme. Those who know the influence, which the body of men, who solicit this reform, possess with the inferior ranks of the people... will not think it a matter of little moment to bind them by every tie to the constitution."³⁸¹

381. R. Fergusson. "The Proposed Reform of the Counties of Scotland Impartially Examined : with Observations on the Conduct of the Delegates." (Edinburgh, 1792), 30.

Similar arguments were put forward by Sir William Maxwell in a letter to Dundas' friend and political ally, the Duke of Buccleugh,³⁸² but they had little weight with administration. The threat that the county reformers if denied by Parliament would turn to the Friends of the People was an empty one. Government knew that there was no question but that the country gentlemen would support the status quo in any struggle with the radicals. There was, in short, no reason to grant concessions in order "to bind them by every tie to the constitution". Moreover, when the convention assembled it became clear that Fergusson's assessment of opinion within the counties was seriously defective. The delegates had no intention of rocking the boat and, rather than transmit a full blooded bill to Parliament as recommended by Fergusson, they contented themselves with approving "in principle" a somewhat anaemic bill "that property should be annexed to superiority, in order to afford a proper qualification to vote" and ordering that it be sent to the counties that its clauses might be discussed. The convention completed its business by declaring the movement's attachment to the constitution and its strong disapproval of an "imporper spirit" which had been encouraged by equally "improper writings".³⁸³ By then even the most optimistic radical must have concluded that there was little prospect of securing the support of the county reformers.³⁸⁴

382. Sir William Maxwell to the Duke of Buccleugh, 17 December 1792. The Buccleugh Muniments GD224/31/19/7, f51.

383. The Glasgow Courier, 13 December 1792.

384. Lord Daer, who served as a delegate to both the county reformers' and the Friends of the People's conventions, was in little doubt that nothing much could be expected from the county reformers. He informed the Friends of the People's convention on 12 December that he had to leave to attend the county reformers' meeting "though he did not expect so much good from it." Meikle, op cit, 245.

As the radical menace grew so the old party distinctions became irrelevant. Opposition Whig joined Pittite in a phalanx of reaction. Lord Bute, for example, informed William Adam, on 3 November 1792 that

"As to honors and fortune God knows how long the Jacobin principles may allow anyone to enjoy their birthright.

The levelling spirit appears to advance with hasty strides..

I bear no greater respect to the present government than heretofore: but in such a moment I am averse to opposition."³⁸⁵

The closing of ranks among the propertied classes afforded some relief to Henry Dundas who informed Pitt on 12 November that "Every Body of character, respect, and property are... much of one mind here in all the great Principles of real Government... The Contest is with the lower orders of the People, whose minds are poisoned up to the point of Liberty, Equality, and an Agrarian Law."³⁸⁶ However the growing social and political polarisation afforded no satisfaction to the Foxite Whig Friends of the People. George Tierney wrote to his fellow associator Charles Grey on 29 October stating that

"The Leveller & the Reformer, the King and the Tyrant seem in the new vocabularies of courtiers and Patriots to be confounded and considered as synonymous, and I much fear we shall neither gain Proselytes from amongst those who seem attached to the very defects of the constitution, or those who seek to overturn it altogether.

On the one hand we are suspected of meaning too much, and

385. Lord Bute to William Adam, 3 November 1792. Blair Adam Muniments. General Correspondence, 1792, A-Z.

386. Henry Dundas to William Pitt, 12 November 1792. University of Michigan. Ann Arbor. Melville Papers.

on the other of meaning too little, and we neither possess weight enough to induce one party to make concessions, or to qualify & temper the extravagant demands of the other."

Tierney was anxious that despite these difficulties the London Friends of the People should rouse themselves from their torpor and "immediately form some Plan of Operation for the next campaign", but he reported that "many" others, "very sensible men and well wishers to the cause", had advised that the society should lie low and that Grey should not bring forward his promised motion for reform in the next session of Parliament.³⁸⁷ Such contradictory advice did nothing to cure the London Friends of the People of the vacillation which had afflicted them throughout much of their short history, and the society proved incapable of giving a much needed lead to the parliamentary reform movement during the critical months of November and December. The Scottish Foxite reformers were assailed by the same anxieties as their English colleagues, and at least some of their number resolved to lower the political temperature by persuading the radical societies to "ly off for a little." Consequently when it was proposed that a national convention of the Friends of the People be called, the Foxites mounted a vigorous opposition, warning of "the danger of proceeding" and assuring the radicals "that if they will ly off for a little, there will be so great an accession to them both for numbers & respectability from all quarters that their application no Minister will dare

387. George Tierney to Charles Grey, 29 October 1792. University of Durham, Earl Grey Papers. 2nd Earl Grey's Papers. Letters from George Tierney.

to refuse."³⁸⁸ Such arguments carried little weight with the great majority of radicals who suspected that behind them lurked Whig treachery,³⁸⁹ and when Thomas Muir proposed, at a meeting of the Edinburgh delegate committee on 21 November, that "this Convention [sic] do agree to a General Convention by Delegates from all the Associations in Scotland", his motion was unanimously agreed to.³⁹⁰ Circular letters were dispatched on 23 November requesting that the societies send delegates to the convention, which was to assemble at Edinburgh on 11 December,³⁹¹ and on 5 December the Edinburgh delegate committee was informed by its Committee of Correspondence that "the measure of a General Convention was universally approved."³⁹² The Foxites however were loath to admit defeat and William Robertson informed William Adam on 8 December that "A motion will be made that the meeting [i.e. the national convention] should adjourn for the present & wait till they see the fate of Mr. Grey's motion." Robertson hoped that it would be carried, but was worried that "many of the Delegates" would be "unwilling... to return without doing anything."³⁹³

388. "Paper on the Question Should the Convention of the Friends of the People be held at this Time". JC26/280. See also a draft letter from William Skirving to Henry Shipley, the secretary of the Nottingham Society for Promoting a Parliamentary Reform, in which Skirving states that "It was not the will of some who would first take the lead among us that we should have had a general convention". This letter, which is undated but dateable to the period July-September 1793, is to be found in JC26/269.

389. See the "Paper on the Question Should the Convention of the Friends of the People be held at this Time." Loc cit.

390. The Caledonian Mercury, 24 November 1792.

391. "Circular Letter of the Committee of Convention", Edinburgh, 23 November 1792. JC26/280.

392. The Caledonian Chronicle, 7 December 1792.

393. William Robertson to William Adam, 8 December 1792. Blair Adam Muniments, General Correspondence, 1792, A-Z.

As the Friends of the People prepared for their convention the precarious unity which had bound Foxite and radical reformer together since July seemed more precarious than ever. There was an immense gulph between those who disapproved of the convention and argued that the movement's activities should be run down and those who believed that the campaign for reform should be intensified. It is difficult to see how that gulph could have been bridged.

One day before the Edinburgh committee agreed to call a national convention of the Friends of the People a group of ultra-loyalists led by John Reeves (1752?-1829) met at the Crown and Anchor Tavern in London to form an Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers. Their object was to organise a united front against the radicals and to strengthen thereby the hands of government. The meeting recommended that "all those who are friends to the established law, and to peaceable society" should "form themselves, in their different neighbourhoods, into similar Societies for promoting the same laudable purposes."³⁹⁴ This recommendation was well received in Scotland, where for some time conservatives had been discussing the utility of counter-associations,³⁹⁵ and December saw the formation of a number of such bodies.³⁹⁶ Meanwhile the government itself decided to act decisively. On 1 December Home

394. The Caledonian Mercury, 1 December 1792.

395. For example a Glasgow loyalist wrote, on 12 October 1792, that "I have been talking to some Friends of forming Societies to counteract the Operations of these Reformers and I am sure 3/4ths of the People of Property w^d join us, but we fear by taking so much notice of them it might add fuel to the flame." [?] Moncrieff to A. Maconochie, 12 October 1792. Home Office Correspondence (Scotland) RH2/4/64, f369.

396. For example, at Dunfermline on 4 December, "The Caledonian Mercury", 10 December 1792; at Edinburgh on 7 December, "The Caledonian Mercury", 8 December 1792; at Campsie on 11 December 1792; "The Glasgow Courier", 18 December 1792.

Secretary Dundas issued a circular letter, addressed to the magistrates of the burghs and the sheriffs of the counties, ordering them to "make diligent inquiry respecting all... wicked and seditious writings" and to report their findings to the Lord Advocate "in order that the authors, printers, publishers, and distributors of all such wicked and seditious writings... may be severely dealt with... according to Law."³⁹⁷ The same day a Royal Proclamation was issued calling out the English Militia to suppress "acts of riot and insurrection" and summoning, as the law required, Parliament to meet on 13 December. The 'Bee' commented that "things wear at present every appearance of war both foreign and domestic."³⁹⁸

Thus, it was against a background of growing alarm in the country, of loyalist associations springing up to defend the constitution with their members' "lives and fortunes", of the Whig friends of liberty apparently preparing to betray the cause of reform, of imminent war with revolutionary France, and of the Government embarking upon a policy of domestic repression, that the Friends of the People met in Convention on 11 December 1792.

397. The Caledonian Chronicle, 7 December 1792.

398. The Bee, or Literary Weekly Intelligencer, XII, "Historical Chronicle", 12 December, pXIV.